

BS
2395
C82
1766

THE EARLY CHURCH

Studies in Early Christian History and Theology

ABRIDGED EDITION

by

OSCAR CULLMANN

Edited by

A. J. B. HIGGINS

THE WESTMINSTER PRESS
PHILADELPHIA

First published, 1956; This abridged edition, 1966;
© Oscar Cullmann, 1956

These essays were originally numbered II–VI in the selection published under the title *The Early Church* in 1956; and the original pagination has been retained in this edition for the convenience of scholars. A. J. B. Higgins translated chapters 1 and 3 of this edition, and Stanley Godman translated chapters 2, 4, and 5.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO. 66-20093

Published by The Westminster Press®
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Contents

1. THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTMAS	17
2. THE PLURALITY OF THE GOSPELS AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM IN ANTIQUITY	37
3. THE TRADITION	55
4. THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	101
5. THE RETURN OF CHRIST	139

ABBREVIATIONS

J.B.L. *Journal of Biblical Literature*

R.B. *Revue Biblique*

R.H.P.R. *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*

T.W.N.T. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*

Z.N.T.W. *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Dedicated to

DR FLOYD V. FILSON

Dean of McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago

in gratitude and friendship

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IT MAY seem presumptuous of me to have accepted the kind invitation of the S.C.M. Press to publish already a collection of some of my essays which have appeared in recent years in German or French theological journals and series. Such collections are usually published posthumously, or at least at the end of a scholar's career. I hope, however, to be able to continue for many more years my work on the beginnings of Christianity and on the theological understanding of the New Testament, and I believe I am still capable of the possible and necessary development and even correction of my thought.

My main reason for agreeing nevertheless to the publication of the present volume is that the studies collected here make clearer the critical-theological position which informs my larger and better-known writings.

In the coming years I hope to complete further larger works on which I have long been working. My *Christology of the New Testament* will appear in a few months' time. I think it is important, also in view of these forthcoming publications, that my critical-theological position should be made quite clear—especially since I have not committed myself to any of the current theological trends.

Above all I trust that two facts will emerge clearly from these papers. The first is that I adhere unreservedly to the historical-philological method as the foundation of all interpretation of the oldest Christian documents. The second is that just as resolutely I reject the theological preconceptions of a modernizing interpretation which are commonly associated with the historical-philological method—preconceptions which, in the interest of some philosophical theory or other, seek either to strip off as a mere external garment or forcedly to reinterpret the very thing which is *central* to the faith of the first Christians. These methods, much favoured at present, I reject precisely for scientific reasons.

Critical study ought to have in common with the Christian faith above all *the obedient willingness simply to listen to what the authors of the New Testament have to say to us*, without too quickly, from the very beginning, confusing the issue by introducing the other

question whether we can reconcile their faith with modern philosophical theories. Such a mixture of two different questions can only obscure correct exegesis of the texts.

I also hope that the essays in this volume will show that from different angles I always come again to the same conclusion, namely, that the real centre of early Christian faith and thought is *redemptive history* (*Heilsgeschichte*), especially in its consistent application to the post-resurrection age in which we live—to the time of the Church and of the already now realized, though invisible, kingship of Christ who reigns at the right hand of God. Formerly the idea of *Heilsgeschichte* was used only in dogmatic works. My aim is to bring it to the forefront in interpreting the New Testament itself.

To my friend Dr. A. J. B. Higgins, Lecturer in the New Testament in the University of Leeds, I express my sincere thanks for all his help in editing and supervising the translation of the present collection of essays.

This volume is dedicated to Dr. Floyd V. Filson, Dean of McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, who has contributed so much to the fact that my writings have been made available to the English-speaking theological world. It is my hope that the publication of this volume in English will stimulate further that discussion with British and American scholars which I have found so fruitful.

Basel—Paris
September 1955

OSCAR CULLMANN

1

The Origin of Christmas

Translated from *Weihnachten in der alten Kirche*, 1947, Basel. The footnotes, and the last two references in the Foreword, are taken from the French edition, *Noël dans l'Église ancienne*, 1949, Neuchâtel.

Foreword

THE FOLLOWING PAGES had their origin in a scientific dissertation, read to a learned audience. But here the material has been rewritten for a wider public, and all technical discussions have been omitted. The questions to be discussed are extremely complicated; and far from being fully clarified, need a good deal more investigation. At first sight, therefore, a popular treatment seems impossible, although Arnold Meyer gave a quite successful one in his rather larger work some thirty years ago. Since then learned studies and discussions have gone on without, so far, achieving final agreement on all points. Yet scholars are agreed about the main outlines of the historical developments; and their general conclusions can and should be made available in an easily intelligible form to a wider circle of educated people. The amount of ignorance of the elementary facts of Church history and the history of dogma, even where importance is attached to general education, is amazing. The result is that catchwords and slogans are all too readily accepted. This has indeed happened in the study of the origins of Christmas, for the origin of the festival has been confused with that of customs associated with it.

The latter problem is not dealt with here. We shall confine ourselves to a quite different question, that of the origin of Christmas in the early Church, and this demands an historical sketch. Of course, the question of the *nature* of Christmas inevitably arises, and on it opinions are sharply divided. Is it pagan or Christian? This will be treated within the historical framework and in connection with the historical results. The problem of the claim of the Christmas festival to a place within the Christian Church is a theological one, upon which our method will be able to shed some light.

Those who are interested in the learned studies and more technical discussions, upon which the present work is based, may begin with H. Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, 2nd edn., 1911. A different standpoint is adopted by L. Duchesne, especially in *Les origines du culte chrétien*, 5th edn., 1920. Among more recent studies of particular problems may be mentioned K. Holl, *Ursprung des Epiphaniensfestes*

(*Ges. Aufsätze*, II, 1928, p. 123 f.), and B. Botte, *Les origines de la Noël et de l'Épiphanie*, 1932. Also two notes by G. Brunner (*Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 1935, p. 178 f.), and K. Prümm (*Stimmen der Zeit*, 1938-39, p. 215).

The Origin of Christmas

OUR Christmas festival of December 25th was unknown to the Christians of the first three centuries. Down to the beginning of the fourth century this day, subsequently to become a central date in the Christian Church, was allowed by the Christians to pass by unhonoured and unsung, without any assembling together for worship, and without Christ's birth being so much as mentioned. By contrast, we shall see that in the pagan Roman empire December 25th was dedicated, as his special festival, to the worship of the sun.

Before the birth of Christ came to be celebrated on December 25th, it was commemorated in the east, and later also in the west, on another day, January 6th. But its association with a definite day could not have been of fundamental significance for the nature of the festival, for the simple reason that, apart from individual attempts to calculate a definite date, the Church of the first three centuries accepted the fact that we are quite ignorant of the date of the birth of Jesus.

This brings us to our first enquiry.

(1) The Date of the Birth of Jesus

The evangelists do not tell us the day of Christ's birth, and there is no other source of information at our disposal. Luke's nativity narrative mentions the shepherds in the fields—a hint of the time of year to which Luke assigned the birth of Jesus, but that is all. This is meagre enough, especially when it is realized that in Palestine the shepherds are in the fields from March–April until November, and so spring, summer and autumn would all come into the picture. That is all that can be deduced from the Gospel accounts about the date.

In the absence of more precise information some early Christians attempted to divine the date by indulging in all sorts of speculations, which are totally devoid of historical value, and received no official recognition in the early Church. They were merely individual efforts to calculate the date, and they diverged widely from one another. I give just a few examples. In a document dating from the

year 243,¹ March 28th is given as Christ's birthday.² Why March 28th? The writer starts from the passage in Genesis in which God at the creation separates the light from the darkness. He explains this as meaning that light and darkness formed two equal parts. Consequently, the creation of the world must have taken place on a day when day and night were of the same length. Now in the Roman calendar the vernal equinox, when day and night have the same length, was on March 25th, and so this was the first day of creation. Further, in the creation story God made the sun on the fourth day, that is, March 28th. And since for Christians, according to Malachi 4.2, the Messiah is the 'sun of righteousness', it follows that Jesus must have come into the world on March 28th.

There are other sources belonging to the first three centuries which also expressly place the birth of Christ in the spring, for example, the Clementines.³ But they do not agree about the date. By the use of all sorts of arithmetical and imaginative ingenuity some of them assign the birthday of Jesus to April 19th, others to May 20th.⁴ April 2nd is also mentioned. This preference for the spring is due both to the belief that the beginning of the world took place in the spring, and to the fact that Jesus died in the spring. His life must end, it was felt, with the completion of a natal year.

In the rarer cases, where a date in the winter was chosen, it was still the spring which was the starting-point of the calculation. The conception of Jesus was placed in the spring, and his birth then took place nine months later, in the winter. This is how December 25th may have been decided upon at one time,⁵ because it corresponded to March 25th, nine months before; and so the latter was observed simultaneously as the day both of creation and of Christ's conception, and in addition as the day of his death. But in any case, down to the first half of the fourth century, no greater importance was attached to December 25th than to the many other dates we have mentioned. January 6th would have been arrived at in a similar way: it is nine months after April 6th, which would then be regarded as the day both of Christ's death and of his conception.

This unrestricted indulgence in fanciful speculations proves that

¹ Wrongly attributed to Cyprian. *De Pascha computus*, ed. Hartel, III, p. 248 f. See Usener, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 251 f.

³ *Hom.* I, 6.

⁴ According to Clem. Alex., *Stromata*, I, 21, 145.6 and 146.4 (ed. Stählin, p. 90).

⁵ Julius Africanus in his *Chronography of the Year 221*.

the Church did not yet attach any definite dogmatic importance to the question of the date of the birthday of Jesus. Clement of Alexandria, at the end of the second century, pours ridicule upon those who claim by such methods to establish the date of Christ's birth.⁶

(2) *The Festival of January 6th*

We have seen that in the first three centuries great individual freedom in attempting to determine the day when Jesus was born was accompanied by official indifference to the matter on the part of the Church. The realization that the true date was unknown shows that the first impulse to celebrate Christ's appearance on earth was provided, not by a date, but by theological considerations. In the course of our enquiry we shall be faced with the problem whether this basically theological idea goes back to a pagan festival, or whether it springs from the reflections and needs of Christians, and so whether conceptions which belong to a pagan festival play only a secondary role in the Church's choice of a date.

In the earliest period the Christians not only accepted the fact that the date of the birth of Jesus is unknown; they felt besides no need to celebrate Christ's coming down to earth at all. The primitive Church was far more interested in Christ's death and resurrection than in his incarnation. Every Lord's Day (later called Sunday) was a 'day of resurrection' and, in addition, there was a single Christian festival, that of Easter, which, along with the holy days associated with it, celebrated Christ's death and resurrection. Similarly, the festivals in honour of the apostles and martyrs in early Christianity were associated not with their birthdays, but with their deaths. Writing at the beginning of the third century, Origen objected to the celebration of any birthday, as being a pagan custom. He points out that in the Bible only the heathen and the godless (Pharaoh and Herod) celebrated their birthdays.⁷

But these considerations could not apply to Christ, for he was indeed more than a martyr or an apostle; he was the redeemer of mankind! Even though the essential act of salvation was only completed in his death, still it was unavoidable that his entry into the world should come to be construed as soteriological in the highest

⁶ *Stromata*, I, 21, 145.5 (ed. Stählin, p. 90). It is true that elsewhere he himself seems to allow November 17th as the date of Christ's birth.

⁷ *Commentary on Matthew XIV*, 6 (ed. Klostermann, p. 30). See also *Hom. in Levit.*, VIII, 3.

degree. That is why, as early as Matthew and Luke, special accounts were written to throw light upon the birth of Jesus; and John, too, described its supernatural quality from his own standpoint. Once faith in the crucified and exalted Lord had been taken as the starting-point of theological reflection on the question of Christ's person and work, his incarnation was bound to become more and more central in devout speculation. Eastern Christians in particular pondered the mystery of God's entry into the world in a human person. There were various possible ways of understanding this event. Some held that the divine Christ first appeared on earth in the human Jesus at the moment of baptism. This is the heretical view, according to which Christ, a divine being, could not have entered a fleshly existence completely, but was only temporarily united with the human Jesus from the baptism when the voice of God declared: 'Thou art my beloved son'. On the other hand, in what later became the orthodox view of the Church, God appeared in the very person of the historical human Jesus, and so the divine Word entered the world at the very moment of his birth. In these christological ideas we see the real beginnings of the Christian festival of Christmas. We are told by Clement of Alexandria in particular that the followers of the Alexandrian Gnostic Basilides, who lived in the second century, celebrated the baptism of Christ on January 10th or 6th.⁸ This is at present our earliest source for dating Christmas. Basilides and his followers represented the heretical opinion that the divine Christ first *appeared* on earth at the baptism of Jesus; and their festival of the baptism was accordingly called Epiphany, *epiphaneia* being the Greek word for 'appearing'. So, while the disciples of Basilides celebrated the mystery of Christ's entry into this world at the beginning of January, the festival still had nothing to do with the *birth* of Jesus. The latter obviously, in their view, possessed no central religious significance, since for them the real divine Epiphany coincided with the baptism of Jesus.

Why did they celebrate this festival of the baptism in the early part of January, and in particular, on January 6th? The Gospels, which do not give the date of the birth of Jesus, are equally silent about that of his baptism. It has been rightly pointed out in this connection that, in the pagan world, a feast of Dionysus, associated with the lengthening of the days, was held on January 6th; that in Alexandria itself the birth of Aeon to the maiden Koré was commemorated on that day; and that it was probably observed as the

⁸ Clem. Alex., *Stromata*, I, 21, 146.1 (ed. Stählin, p. 90).

day of Osiris. In the night before January 6th the waters of the Nile were said to possess special miraculous power. This fact explains why the disciples of Basilides chose this date for the festival of Christ's baptism: it was in order to proclaim, in distinction from the heathen, that the true divine being who had appeared upon the earth was Christ, who entered this world in the Jordan at the moment when the voice uttered the words: 'Thou art my beloved son.'

What has all this to do with Christmas? This festival of the baptism kept by the disciples of Basilides on January 6th was adopted from its heretical opponents by the orthodox eastern Church, which borrowed certain other ecclesiastical customs. Now we have seen that Christ's baptism was originally celebrated simply because it came under the same heading as his manifestation, or Epiphany, which was the dominant idea of the feast. On the other hand, the Church outside heretical circles followed the nativity narratives in the Gospels, and regarded his birth, and not his baptism, as the real appearing of Christ upon earth. Possibly, indeed, many heretical Gnostics themselves assigned both baptism and birth to January 6th. But especially when his divinity was being discussed at the beginning of the fourth century, Christ's birth was bound to be regarded as the occasion when he was manifested. In any case it is an established fact that by the first half of the fourth century the Church was observing Epiphany on January 6th, and in so doing conjoined the baptism and the birth of Christ. Not that anything was removed from the original baptism festival, but rather that the celebration of the birth was added. The festival was divided into two parts according to the order in which the two events took place. The night of January 5th-6th was devoted to the festival of Christ's birth, the day January 6th to that of his baptism. Thus, before the birth of Christ came to be celebrated on December 25th, that joyful event was commemorated on the night of January 5th-6th.

There is an Egyptian papyrus of the beginning of the fourth century which contains a kind of liturgical formula intended for a church choir, with the liturgical parts for the choir to sing in response to the reading by the priest.⁹ The numerous finger-marks show that the leaf must have been much used. It is clear from another liturgical note on the reverse side that it concerns the feast of Epiphany of

⁹ Published by G. Bickell in *Mittheilungen aus der Sammlung der Papyrus, Erzherzog Rainer*, 1887, II, p. 83-86. Cf. Usener, *op. cit.*, p. 196 f.

January 5th-6th, when Christ's baptism in the Jordan was commemorated. The fragment concerns that part of the festival devoted to the birth of Christ. This interesting papyrus contains the oldest Christmas liturgy we possess, and in it Christmas is still observed on the night of January 5th-6th. To the reading of the biblical account of the story of Christ's birth at Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, and the return to Nazareth, the choir responded by singing the following Greek hymn:

'Born at Bethlehem
Brought up at Nazareth
Dwelt in Galilee.'

Then the priest would have read the story of the Magi from the Gospel of Matthew, and the choir responded:

'We have seen a sign from heaven,
the shining star.'

After this the Christmas story from Luke 2 was read, and the choir responded:

'Shepherds in the field tending their flocks were amazed, they fell
on their knees, and sang: Glory to the Father.
Halleluiah.
Glory to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
Halleluiah. Halleluiah. Halleluiah.'

Such was the way in which Christ's birthday was celebrated on January 5th-6th at the commencement of the fourth century.

At Alexandria other additional elements were associated with the birth and baptism of Christ in this early Christian Epiphany festival. Besides the appearing of Jesus at his birth and his public appearance at his baptism, his manifestation in his miracles was recalled: the miracle of the changing of water into wine at Cana (to which the old pagan belief in the miraculous powers of the Nile may have given support), and the feeding of the multitude; while the star, which the Magi from the east had seen, was always mentioned as the first manifestation. This story of the star is the one remaining element of the many-sided Epiphany feast of January 6th as it was kept in the early Church.

A description of this festival has also been preserved by the fourth-

century Syrian Church Father Ephraem.¹⁰ He calls the festival of January 6th the most sublime of Christian festivals. He says that on this day every house was decked with garlands (perhaps a distant ancestor of our Christmas tree). Ephraem describes the tremendous joy which reigned in the entire Church. The very walls of the church building, he declares, seem to exult on this day, and the children utter nothing but words of happiness. Then he specially describes the beautiful nocturnal festival. 'The night is here,' he cries, 'the night which has given peace to the universe! Who would sleep on this night when the whole world is awake!' Then is celebrated the birth of Christ, with the adoration of the shepherds and the appearance of the star. The following day was dedicated to the adoration of the Magi and to the baptism of Christ in the Jordan. In one of his own hymns Ephraem seeks to combine the different elements of the Epiphany festival.

'The whole creation proclaims,
The Magi proclaim,
The star proclaims:
Behold, the king's son is here!
The heavens are opened,
The waters of Jordan sparkle,
The dove appears:
This is my beloved son!'

In this poem we see how closely at this date Christ's baptism and birth were combined and focused together in the concept of his advent.

The feast of Epiphany continued for a long time to be celebrated in Palestine with extraordinary splendour. We have the well-known account of it by the noble pilgrim Aetheria, who spent three years in Palestine.¹¹ She cannot find words adequate to describe the magnificence of the festival, and the beauty of the singing which resounded from the midst of the enormous multitude of people. She tells how all, along with the bishop, repair in solemn procession to Bethlehem on the night of January 5th-6th, in order to hold a service at night in the cave where Jesus was supposed to have been born. Before daybreak the whole procession moved off to Jerusalem singing hymns continually in honour of Christ who had come to

¹⁰ Thomas J. Lamy, *Ephraemi Syri hymni et sermones*, I, 1882. Other 'De nativitate domini sermones' have been published by Petrus Mobarek (Benedictus), cf. Usener, *op. cit.*, p. 202, n. 9.

¹¹ Ethérie, *Journal de voyage*, 'Sources chrétiennes' 21, Paris, 1948, p. 203 f.

the world. As January 6th dawns they reach Jerusalem, and enter the Church of the Resurrection, whose interior is illuminated with incredible brightness by the light of thousands of candles. There they sing psalms and the priest offers prayers. Then all depart to rest for a few hours. Towards midday they reassemble in the Church of the Resurrection. The first part of the festival ends at midday, and in the evening the second part commences with renewed splendour.

In all three descriptions the idea of light plays a large part, and is given a symbolic meaning. The appearance of Christ in the world is already depicted in the New Testament as the entry of the light into the darkness. This may have had something to do with the special choice of January 6th, the day on which the lengthening of the days was celebrated by pagans as the birth of Aeon. But it is not at all probable that this gave the start to the Christian festival, since the idea of the light, which appeared in Christ and dispersed the darkness, is as old as Christianity itself, and can be traced throughout the whole of the New Testament.

The details of these ancient descriptions of the Epiphany festival of January 5th and 6th are included in order to show that the whole complex of Christian thought connected with our Christmas was already present in it in liturgical form. It will not do to speak of Christmas only as a feast observed on December 25th. The fact that Christmas was celebrated during the Epiphany feast of January 6th, together with a festival of the Magi, the baptism and the wedding at Cana, in no way alters the fact that all the Christian ideas connected with Christmas were expressed liturgically and symbolically in this festival, and that the separation of the nativity festival from its association with Epiphany actually imported no essentially new idea.

The question whether Christ was actually born on January 6th was entirely secondary. It would hardly have occurred to anyone to ask whether the events which were being commemorated simultaneously at this festival all took place on January 6th. The important thing was not the date, but Christ's 'appearing' for which the festival stood. So it was quite easy for the date of the celebration of his birth to be changed in the course of the fourth century. And so we come to the festival of December 25th.

(3) *The Festival of December 25th*

When and why was the nativity festival separated from Epiphany as it has just been described, and given a special date of its own, December 25th? There is still no complete agreement among

scholars on the chronological question. The most probable assumption is that this took place in Rome between 325 and 354, after the older Epiphany festival had already come from the east to the west, perhaps even to Rome. December 25th is attested in Rome as the day of Christ's birth in the year 336,¹² and must have been observed as such even before this under Constantine the Great.¹³ Possibly in Rome at first the older Epiphany festival continued to be observed in its original form for a time, after the new festival was well on the way to becoming naturalized.

Now what are the reasons which led to the separation of the festival of Christ's birth from Epiphany, and to its transference to December 25th? I should say at once that the calculation which assigned the birth to December 25th, which we come upon occasionally among many other similar calculations, can scarcely have given the initiative. The determining factor was rather the dogmatic development of christology at the beginning of the fourth century. Moreover, in the pagan world December 25th was observed as a specially important festival in honour of the sun god, and the emperor Constantine the Great pursued the deliberate policy of uniting the worship of the sun with that of Christ.

¹² According to the *Chronography of Philocalus of the year 354* (Th. Mommsen, *Über den Chronographen vom Jahre 354* (Abh. d. sächs. Ges. d. Wiss., I), 1850, p. 631). The main controversy between H. Usener and L. Duchesne centres on this text. Usener uses it as the basis of his claim that December 25th was first observed in Rome as Christ's birthday in 354, since even in the previous year, according to Ambrose's account of the consecration of his sister Marcellina (*De virg.*, III, 1), the birth of Christ was still commemorated on January 6th. But in the *Bulletin critique* of 1890 (p. 41 f.) Duchesne establishes the important fact that the first edition of the *Chronography* must have been written before October 336.

¹³ Professor U. Holzmeister has called attention to the suggestion of G. Brunner (*Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 1935, p. 178 f.) and K. Prümmer (*Stimmen der Zeit*, 1938-39, p. 215) that the festival of December 25th could date from the reign of the emperor Aurelian (270-75). They point to Sermon 202 of Augustine (Migne, P. L. 38, 1033) which upbraids the Donatists for not observing January 6th along with the Catholic Church. These two scholars think that it can thus be concluded that when the Donatists seceded from the Church in 311 they were already accustomed to observe December 25th, and that therefore this date was known to the Church from that time and probably much earlier, from the time of Aurelian, whose fondness for the worship of the sun is well known. Ingenious though this argument is, it contains too many doubtful hypotheses. As Usener (p. 15 f.) had already pointed out, Augustine's censure of the Donatists for failing to observe January 6th does not imply that they celebrated Christ's birthday on December 25th.

In the first place, at the famous Council of Nicaea in 325 the Church expressly condemned the doctrine that God himself did not become incarnate in Jesus at his birth. This involved the rejection of all other interpretations, including the one that Jesus was adopted by God at his baptism. In the decisions of the Council a very important part was played by the Roman Church. It is easy to understand how these debates favoured, as we have seen, the spread of a birth festival as such, quite apart from the question of date; and how, from the standpoint of dogma, the connection of a nativity festival with that of the baptism under the common theme of 'appearing' must in time have been felt to be theologically objectionable. For was not this to combine orthodoxy with heresy? The tendency, then, to dissociate the festival of the birth from the Epiphany festival is to be explained as the result of christological speculation.

But this raised the problem of finding a new date for the nativity festival. Here a very influential factor was the existence, in Mithraism which was widespread in the Roman empire, of a cult of the sun whose chief festival fell on December 25th, the winter solstice. We have seen that the symbol of light shining in darkness, which is fundamental to the New Testament, is already inherent in the festival of Christ's appearing upon earth, and that the choice of January 6th had given expression to it. Now, when it was a question of a date for the separate and independent festival of Christ's birth, the day which had the first claim to attention was one in proximity to January 6th, a day which in the pagan Roman world was the day, without any question, in honour of the light, the sun, namely, December 25th. Before the introduction of Mithraism, the Roman emperors had already built a temple to *sol invictus*, the 'unconquered sun god'; and in the third century splendid festive games were held on December 25th in honour of the conquering rising sun. Great bonfires were lit, whose purpose was to help the sun to climb above the horizon. The worship of the 'unconquered sun' assumed a more concrete form in Mithraism, which was especially popular among the Roman soldiers, and was for some time in the third century a serious rival of Christianity.

It is understandable, therefore, that the Roman Church intentionally opposed to this pagan nature cult its own festival of light, the festival of the birth of Christ, the infant Jesus, who in Simeon's song was hailed as 'the light to lighten the Gentiles'. Time and again the Church calls to mind that the words in Malachi 4.2, 'For you shall the sun of righteousness arise', are a prophecy of Christ. Ambrose,

bishop of Milan, for example, says in a sermon in which he expressly contrasts the pagan and Christian festivals: 'Christ is *our* new sun!'¹⁴ Augustine, again, alludes to the pagan festival of December 25th in his summons to Christians not to worship the sun on this day, like the pagans, but him who created the sun¹⁵; while Pope Leo the Great rebuked the sorry faith of those who celebrated Christmas as the birth of the sun instead of as that of Christ.¹⁶ In any case, these utterances show that the fixing of the festival of Christ's birth on December 25th was not done in ignorance of the pagan significance of the day.

Of course, Constantine's deliberate policy of combining the worship of the sun and that of Christ certainly helped in all this. But it should now be taken as settled that Constantine was not so much a Christian as a conscious syncretist: he strove after a synthesis of Christianity and the valuable elements in paganism. Christianity was the religion he most favoured simply because its organization made it the best able to unite the empire. But Constantine may well have thought that the multifarious religions of the empire could somehow be carried on within the single framework of Christianity. We hear nothing of any deliberate attack on paganism, nor did he renounce paganism until he received baptism on his death-bed. Certainly he strove for a reform of paganism in the direction of Christianity: he abolished the pagan system of oracles, the offering of private sacrifices and certain grossly immoral temple cults. All his life, however, he promoted the worship of the sun. He allowed himself to be represented in two statues as the sun god with shining rays, and permitted the following inscription to be placed on the pedestal: 'To Constantine, who brings light like the sun'. It was certainly Constantine's intention to combine the worship of the sun with the worship of Christ; and that was possible because the sun was itself one of the Christian symbols of Christ.

It was with this end in view that, in the year 321, he introduced the Christian Lord's Day as an officially authorized weekly day of rest; for it coincided with a day dedicated to the sun god. From the middle of the second century the term 'Sunday' occurs for the former 'Lord's Day'. This means that Christian thought about the redemptive act of the resurrection of Christ (which is, of course, the

¹⁴ Sermon VI, Migne, *P. L.* 17, 614.

¹⁵ Sermo in Nat. Dom., 7, and Sermo in Nat. Joh. Bapt., Migne, *P. L.* 38, 1007 and 1302.

¹⁶ Sermon XXVII, Migne, *P. L.* 54; see 'Sources chrétiennes' 22, p. 143 f.

Christian meaning of Sunday) had already become associated with the symbolism of the sun. So bearing in mind Constantine's partiality for sun worship, it is plain that one of his most far-reaching Christian measures, giving the Christian Sunday a legal status, was intended by him at the same time to bring the pagan sun worship in a Christian form into Christianity.

The analogy of Sunday, which certainly became the official holy day under Constantine, seems to make it probable that it was as early as Constantine, and through his influence, that the festival of Christ's birth was changed over to December 25th, the great festival of the sun. Christ's birth was now linked up with the sun on December 25th in the same way as his resurrection with Sunday (the day of the sun).

Admonitions like those of Augustine and Pope Leo had now clearly become necessary, for this deeply-rooted pagan festival of the 'unconquered sun god' did not, in fact, simply disappear, but persisted in many practices which passed over into the Christian festival. So when Christmas was separated from another Christian festival, that of Christ's baptism, it fell under the influence of a pagan one. At first this influence was felt in Christmas *customs*. We learn, for instance, from a Syrian theologian that Christians also now began the practice of lighting bonfires on this day.¹⁷ But the idea that Christ is the light of the world shining in the darkness is independent of the festival of December 25th; it was already there in the feast of January 6th. Indeed, it was in Christianity from the very beginning, independently of any festival.

(4) *The Spread of the Festival of December 25th*

We have still to enquire how, from the second half of the fourth century, the festival of December 25th spread from Rome throughout the whole of Christendom. Rome sought to get the Churches of the east also to accept this Christmas festival thus separated from Epiphany—an endeavour by no means universally easy, for many eastern Churches firmly adhered to the practice of observing the festival of Christ's birth in its old form as an Epiphany festival on January 5th–6th. Opposition was particularly stubborn in Syria. Rome tried in vain, probably for a decade from 375, to establish the observance of December 25th at Antioch. Success was first achieved

¹⁷ A scholiast of Bar Salibi, see Assemani, *Bibl. Orient.*, 2, 164. German translation of the text in Usener, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

by the great preacher Chrysostom. In his well-known Christmas sermon of December 20th, 386,¹⁸ he adjured his hearers to present themselves on the 25th, five days later, in order to celebrate Christ's birth, 'that mother of all festivals', 'which inspires in all the greatest reverence and awe'. Let everyone 'leave his home, that we may behold our Lord lying in the manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, a wonderful and awe-inspiring sight'. A great throng obeyed his summons; and Chrysostom used the occasion of his well-known Christmas sermon to convince the members of his Church that Christ's birth must be celebrated on December 25th, because Christ was actually born on that day. As evidence, he not only appeals to supposed Roman records, but employs complicated calculations, which are as worthless as the rest. It was only because of the effort to make December 25th the universal Christmas Day that importance first began to be attached to the question of the historical date of the birth of Jesus. Hitherto this had played a secondary role. Eloquently Chrysostom expresses his joy that Christmas, unknown at Antioch less than ten years ago, has now begun a new and vigorous life there, 'as if it were already a tradition of many years coming from the earliest days of the Church'. Chrysostom succeeded in establishing once for all the feast of December 25th in his Church.

In the meantime the festival had been introduced in 379 into Constantinople under Gregory of Nazianzus, the defender of the divinity of Christ. Egypt continued opposition for a longer time, and did not finally submit until the year 431. But it was especially at Jerusalem that there was the greatest reluctance to countenance the idea that the old Epiphany festival of January 6th should surrender its main content to a new festival. In vain did Jerome expend his eloquence; the Christians of Jerusalem considered that, as they lived in the Holy Land, they had a better knowledge of tradition than those who dwelt in the distant west. In the course of this conflict more and more attention was paid to the insoluble problem of the date, about which the Church of an earlier period had maintained a healthy reserve, even though it celebrated Christ's birth with special pomp. The situation was now quite different; one side endeavoured to prove that Jesus was born on January 6th, the other on December 25th! Probably not till the middle of the sixth century did the Palestinian Church abandon its opposition to December 25th. Only one Church, that of the Armenians, whose attitude earned them the reproach of being 'men with hardened heads and stiff

¹⁸ Migne, P. G. 49, 351 f.

necks',¹⁹ has continued down to the present day to commemorate Christ's birth not on December 25th, but on January 6th.

(5) *Historical and Theological Conclusions*

Finally, what conclusions are to be drawn from the history of the origin of the Christmas festival which has been sketched above?

(a) Christians have never kept Christmas on a historically accurate date, whether on December 25th or on January 6th. The earliest observances of Christmas did not commemorate a date at all, but a fact whose supreme importance for the Christian Church is not confined to a particular day—namely, the appearance of Christ upon earth.

(b) The impulse to celebrate Christ's birth did not come from outside, but was a consequence of theological reflection on the fact of our redemption, the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ, and condescended to our estate.

At this point, of course, Christians were faced with the question whether there was New Testament authority for devoting a special festival to the incarnation of Christ, or whether those early Christians were right who altogether rejected such a festival as un-Christian. And it must be said that *over-estimation* of this festival, in particular giving it any precedence over Good Friday and Easter, is certainly at variance both with Christian practice, which originally included only the latter, and with the theology of the primitive Church. In the New Testament the central events in the story of Christ are his death and resurrection. His incarnation must be viewed in the light of these events, and not *vice versa*. From this standpoint the Christian year should begin not with Advent, but with the round of celebrations at Easter.

Nevertheless, granted this subordination, it is entirely in accordance with the faith of the New Testament to make the birth of Christ the object of a special Church festival. The evangelists Matthew, Luke and John dwell on this event, seeking each in his own way to shed light on it; and in doing so they are only spokesmen of the community which handed down their traditions. In this connection we must make a special note of the hymn, quoted by Paul in Philippians 2.6 ff. It mentions the incarnation of Christ, but it is purely and simply because it deals with his crucifixion and exaltation as Lord that it makes any mention of his becoming a

¹⁹ Jacob Bar Salibi, see Assemani, *Bibl. Orient.*, 2, 164.

servant. This hymn can appropriately be called a Christmas hymn.

Moreover, the liturgical form of the oldest festival of Christ's birth, as seen when we were discussing the vivid descriptions of the Epiphany feast, betrays specifically Christian features. The central idea expressed in liturgical form, that Christ, the light of the world, enters into the darkness, is certainly not derived from the festival of Mithras, the 'unconquered sun god'. This latter was observed on December 25th, whereas the former, as we have proved, was neither more nor less than part of celebrations of Epiphany held on January 6th. Moreover, as found in Epiphany, it is scarcely probable that the idea is derived primarily from a pagan solstice festival observed on January 6th; rather, it is one of those early Christian, New Testament conceptions, which may be accepted as certain. Where the New Testament indulges in theological reflection on the meaning of Christ's incarnation, there we find, in the prologue of the Gospel of John, this thought coming to expression: 'The light shines in the darkness'.

(c) On the other hand, the choice of the dates themselves, both January 6th and December 25th, was determined by the fact that both these days were pagan festivals whose meaning provided a starting-point for the specifically Christian conceptions of Christmas. Constantine's attempt to combine the worship of the sun with that of Christ has certainly to be repudiated from the New Testament point of view, like all Gnostic attempts to merge Christianity in a general religious syncretism, with the resulting loss of its central features. Yet the theologian has to ask whether, in terms of the New Testament, there is not a theological significance in the developments we have described, at the end of which the date of the birthday of Jesus, which dating we know to be without a historical basis, was fixed and observed on a day dedicated to a cosmic natural phenomenon. The New Testament suggests that this was more than mere symbolism; it is a pointer to a theological belief held by the early Church, that Christ is at one and the same time the redeemer of mankind and the redeemer of the whole creation; that the salvation linked with his name applies to the whole universe, just as the fall of man involved the whole creation in the curse. Since mankind and the rest of creation thus form a solidarity, the redemption of man involves the redemption of the whole creation. The view expressed everywhere in the New Testament is that Christ, the redeemer of men, also participated as an agent in the

creation of the world. The solidarity of creation and redemption is shown most clearly in the great central event, the atoning death of Christ. That is the meaning of Matthew's narrative of the darkness and the earthquake (Matt. 27.45, 51) which accompany the death of the redeemer; while Paul, in the epistle to the Colossians (1.20), describes in his own way the supernatural work done on Good Friday, declaring that God through the blood of Christ made peace, not only with men, but with all things in heaven and on earth.

The festival of Christ's birth must be regarded in the light of Good Friday. And so it is entirely in line with the New Testament that, like the latter, Christmas should also be symbolically associated with a phenomenon of nature. The same association, from a different angle, finds expression in Matthew's nativity story, when he tells about the star at Bethlehem.

Christmas, then, centres our attention on the christocentric character of the New Testament revelation, in which everything, the whole creation, is made to refer to Christ, because it looks for its redemption in him (Rom. 8.19 f.). And again, the fact that the 'unconquered sun god' was conquered in the end, and yet that his birthday was not so much suppressed as made subordinate to that of our Saviour Jesus Christ, reminds us that in the New Testament every revelation of God in nature is secondary to his revelation in the sacrifice made by Christ.

In conclusion I quote from the Christmas sermon of Ambrose, which I have already mentioned, a passage which seeks to express these ideas. 'Well do Christian people call this holy day, on which our Lord was born, the day of the new sun; and they assert it so insistently that even Jews and pagans agree with them in using that name for it. We are happy to accept and maintain this view, because with the dayspring of the Saviour, not only is the salvation of mankind renewed, but also the splendour of the sun. . . . For if the sun withdrew its light when Christ suffered, it must shine at his birth with greater splendour than ever before.'²⁰

²⁰ Ambrose, Sermon VI, Migne, *P. L.* 17, 614.

2

The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity

A Study in the History of Dogma

Translated from 'Die Pluralität der
Evangelien als theologisches Problem
im Altertum', *Theologische Zeitschrift*,
i, 1945, p. 23-42, Basel

The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity

IT IS NOT our purpose to deal here with the problem of the origin of the fourfold canon of the Gospel. That would have to be dealt with on its own in a treatise on the history of the canon. In any case it is a question that can only be answered in very general outlines since the extant sources make it impossible to ascertain the various historical stages which led to the Church taking several Gospels as the norm and not just one, four Gospels, that is, from a much greater number of accounts of the life of Jesus that were already available in the second century. As far as the detailed history of the fourfold canon is concerned we are therefore very largely dependent on conclusions *a posteriori*. I should like to mention the latest of the theories to be propounded, that of Walter Bauer in his book *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, which appeared in 1934. It is related to his main thesis, according to which the Christian world of the time, split by many different conceptions of the Gospel, was first compelled to face the problem of orthodoxy by the ecclesio-political aspirations of the Roman Church. According to Bauer, in the Roman Church and the Churches within its sphere of influence, only the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were recognized for a long time, whilst the Gospel of Luke, which was discredited by its exploitation at the hand of heretics, was only accepted after some hesitation, and direct resistance to the Gospel of John was only given up about the year 200, at a time when the reasons which had at first placed the fourth Gospel in a dubious light had lost some of their weight. Bauer's argument includes some assertions worth consideration, bold and intentionally hypothetical though they are. He maintains that Papias only recognized Mark and Matthew; that Justin did not regard the Gospel of John as authoritative, and that Ignatius of Antioch used the Gospel of Matthew, not the Gospel of John.¹

¹ In spite of important points of contact in certain details, this conception of W. Bauer's differs from earlier views as expounded, for example, by A. v. Harnack

Other scholars regard particular aspects of the development differently. As soon as an attempt is made to achieve some precision in the matter it becomes impossible to avoid interpretations which inevitably differ from one another.

In the present study we shall take into account the more or less assured explanations of the origins of the canon only in so far as they serve to illuminate another question which is to be the subject of our enquiry: how far was the fact of a plurality of authoritative evangelists felt to be a theological problem in the ancient Church? The answer to this question will no doubt shed an indirect light on the problem of the historical origins of the canon.

(1) *The Problem*

The fact that the Church takes the fourfold canon of the Gospels for granted makes it difficult for us to see how the matter ever became a problem at all. The idea that in reality the four Gospels are all based on one and the same εὐαγγέλιον represents the solution of the theological problem that has finally won the day, and which is adequately expressed in the headings of our Gospels: εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Μαθθαῖον, Μάρκον, Λουκᾶν, Ἰωάννην. This conception may have existed implicitly before but it was not taken for granted everywhere, and A. Jülicher is wrong when he writes in his *Introduction to the New Testament*²: 'There was no need to be any more offended by four Gospels than by ten or thirteen epistles of Paul, or by the numerous parallel accounts of parts of the Old Testament story (Kings, Chron., Isa. 36-39).' We shall see that it was indeed a problem for many Christians, and that apart from the answer implied in the headings to the Gospels it was also solved in a number of heretical ways.

in 'Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments' (*Beiträge zur Einleitung in das N.T.*, VI), 1914. The latter also regards the establishment of the fourfold Gospel canon as a compromise which took place under the influence of the Gospel of John. According to Harnack the admission of this Gospel played an all-important part in the establishment of a plurality of canonical Gospels. The champions of the Gospel of John had finally enforced their will against its opponents in Asia Minor, the Alogi, but the other Gospels which had already been adopted were not given up, so that it was in Asia Minor that the basic problem of a plurality of Gospels had first arisen.

² 7th edn. (revised in conjunction with E. Fascher), 1931, p. 502. A. Jülicher therefore considers a 'striving after Gospel harmonies' very unlikely. A. v. Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 59, has already refuted this.

In the period when there was still no established canon it was by no means universally considered natural that different and, to some extent, divergent accounts of the life of Jesus should be regarded as equally authoritative. When the need to possess a New Testament canon alongside that of the Old Testament gradually emerged and apostolic authorship was required as the criterion for canonicity, it was inevitable that the combination of our four Gospels should give offence. This is obvious from the various attempts which were made to remove the cause of the offence. If it is necessary to have not one but several accounts of the one life of Jesus which must be the foundation of all Christian belief, it is as good as admitting that none of them is perfect. It was only too easy for the combining of several accounts of the life to be interpreted as a depreciation and disparagement of the individual Gospel. The comparison which Jülicher draws between the Gospels and the Pauline epistles, of which a number were included in the New Testament, is beside the point, since, whereas it was easy to grasp the fact that Paul had written to a number of Churches, it might well seem strange that the fundamental and unique events of the life of Jesus had to be described by several different authors.³ Jülicher's reference to the parallel accounts in the books of the Kings and the Chronicles in the Old Testament is more an argument on the other side, for it is a well-known fact that the two books of the Chronicles originally formed the first part of a history which included the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but in the Hebrew canon the Chronicles come *after* Ezra and Nehemiah. The reason for this unchronological arrangement is that, to begin with, only the second part of the whole work, namely Ezra and Nehemiah, was canonized, whereas the first part, the later books of the Chronicles, was not accepted. Doubts were felt about accepting them into the canon just because their contents run parallel to those of the earlier historical books of the Old Testament.

The only other canonical books that can be quoted for comparison are the five books of Moses. The Gospels have been felt to form exact parallels to them, not least because one of them opens with

³ Disregarding that obvious fact, the Muratorian canon deemed it necessary to point out that Paul wrote to *seven* Churches. It attempted to prove that the number of epistles is not accidental but based on the number of the seven Churches, the symbol of the unity of the Church. This argument is based on just as false a presupposition as Irenaeus's contention with regard to the plurality of the Gospels.

the same words, ἐν ἀρχῇ, as the book of Genesis. The Gospels provide the basic account of the main events of the New Covenant, just as the books of Moses open the story of the Old Covenant. In fact, however, this obvious parallel between the Pentateuch and the Gospels merely aggravated the offence caused by the plurality of the Gospels. It is true that the Pentateuch contains parallel accounts of the same facts, which modern research attributes to different authors. But this variety of authorship meant nothing to the ancient world, since the five books were regarded as the work of the one prophet inspired by God: ἡ κατὰ τὸν Μωυσέα πεντάτευχος.⁴ In contrast to the basic unity of the Pentateuch the New Testament contained not merely two but several parallel accounts by different writers. And even when the plurality was reluctantly accepted it was still not easy to see why these particular Gospels and not others should be adopted. From the standpoint of apostolic status Matthew did not appear to be particularly representative, and of the four Gospels later included in the canon only two of the writers, Matthew and John, were apostles at all. The two other Gospels, Mark and Luke, were only attributed to followers of apostles. The fact that the Church fathers laid special emphasis on the relation of Mark to Peter and Luke to Paul shows that scruples did exist which it was thought necessary to dispel. Being the follower of an apostle was not considered quite equivalent to being an actual apostle. One can see that from Tertullian's treatise against Marcion. In order to refute the great heretic's one-sided preference for the Gospel of Luke he emphasizes the fact that Luke was only the follower of an apostle and that his Gospel could therefore never be adequate on its own.⁵

In any case the plurality of the four Gospels aroused a widespread feeling of arbitrariness and chance which seem incompatible with the requirements of canonicity. This is shown by the efforts to explain the fourfold Gospel and also to do away with it.

(2) *The Dual Tendency to Multiplicity and Reduction*

The problem, and also the attempts to solve it, really appeared as far back as the time when the oldest Gospels were being written, long before the separation of the fourfold canon. In fact, most of the Gospels arose in the first place from an awareness of the problem

⁴ Epiphanius, *Haer.*, 8.4, 5.

⁵ *Adv. Marcionem*, 4.2: 'Porro Lucas non apostolus, sed apostolicus: non magister, sed discipulus'.

of plurality, and each Gospel represented an attempt to solve it anew. But we must not forget that in the early period the idea that their writings might be used canonically was far from the authors' own minds. Each evangelist desired, in all probability, to proclaim the all-important facts of the life of Jesus better than his predecessors had done, 'better' meaning in this case not more accurately, more in accordance with the standards of modern scholarship, but more in keeping with the 'cause' which makes this life the centre of all history for the Church of the risen Lord. From this theological, or rather, christological angle, to which prime importance is attached, and quite rightly so, in works on the history of the form of the Gospels, it was supremely important to make an adequate record of the Church's traditional knowledge of the life of Jesus, particularly in its christological aspect, by collecting and sifting the scattered fragments of the oral tradition. If one of the accounts had proved itself entirely satisfactory in the early Church 'many' others would not have 'undertaken' (Luke 1.1) ⁶ to write a Gospel. The fact that Matthew and Luke incorporated some of their predecessors' work shows that they did not reject the previous Gospels, but, on the other hand, it was clearly not their idea that the earlier Gospels should be set alongside their own and form a kind of unity: it was more their intention that their work should be self-sufficient and an improvement on that of their forerunners.

The question, which has often been raised, whether in the earliest times a new Gospel was intended to 'supplant' or to 'supplement' the previous ones is irrelevant as far as the older Gospels is concerned, that is, those written before the formation of the canon. For it presupposes that the idea of the canon already existed. It certainly was not the intention of the writers of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke to 'supplant', say, the Gospel of Mark, since it could only have been 'supplanted' if it had already been regarded as canonical. On the other hand, the later writers did not intend to 'supplement' it in the sense of wanting to set their own Gospel alongside the previous one. For in this case there would have been no point in admitting certain of Mark's narratives into their own work. They simply wanted to write a new and independent Gospel, one

⁶ Origen, *Hom. I on Luke* (IX, 4 f.), endeavours to relate this ἐπιχειρήσαν merely to apocryphal Gospels, the Gospel of the Egyptians and the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles. See also Eusebius, *H.E.*, 3.24. Origen was mistaken in thinking that the third evangelist intended severe criticism of his predecessors in using this word; the prologue simply means that his Gospel was designed to give a better picture.

which would do the greatest possible justice to the Church's understanding of Christ.

The same applies to the Gospel of John. Here, too, the question raised by Hans Windisch in the title of his book (published in 1926), which may be translated as ⁷ *John and the Synoptics: did the fourth evangelist intend to supplement or replace the earlier Gospels?* is not quite in accord with the facts, inasmuch as the evangelist did not intend either to 'supplement' or to 'replace' the Synoptists. Windisch himself rejects the supplementing theory and we heartily agree with him, for even if it can be shown that some of John's narratives presuppose events which we only know from the Synoptists, it must not be inferred that the writer did not record them simply because he thought his readers could look them up in the Synoptic Gospels. Even in the Johannine narratives which have no parallel at all in the Synoptic Gospels many purely historical details are omitted that one might well have expected in a really vivid report. On the other hand, the evangelist does write in 20.30 that there are 'many other signs' not recorded in this book, and that he had only written his Gospel 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God'. This surely does not mean that he wanted to refer his reader to other Gospels. He wanted rather to offer a self-sufficient Gospel describing the fact of Christ in accordance with the fundamental revelation which it contains. It should be noted, however, that this intention was not bound up with any polemical animus against his predecessors.⁸

This striving of each Gospel writer to do better than his predecessors, not attacking their works, however, but partly incorporating them in their own, could not but be of supreme service to the 'cause' in apostolic times. Admittedly, one result was a multiplicity of Gospels from the very outset. This plurality was based on the very real feeling that none of the previous attempts to describe the human life of Jesus could be considered entirely successful. The trend towards a multiplicity of Gospels existed from the very beginning. But it was accompanied by an opposite tendency to

⁷ My addition. The German title given by Professor Cullmann is *Johannes und die Synoptiker: wollte der vierte Evangelist die ältern Evangelien ergänzen oder ersetzen?* [Ed.]

⁸ In *Das Johannes-Evangelium* (ed. by C. A. Bernoulli, 1914, p. 481 f.) F. Overbeck advocated the 'supplanting' theory in its most extreme form. He relied on 21.20 f. to support the theory that the evangelist himself justified the canonizing of his Gospel, thereby indirectly occasioning the canonizing of the four Gospels.

reduce them all to a single Gospel. Every evangelist wanted to present the 'pure' Gospel, making use, though, of his predecessors' achievements. Thus the Gospels of Matthew and Luke can already be called Gospel harmonies. If the two-source theory, meaning two written sources, were beyond all doubt,⁹ one could call the Gospels of Matthew and Luke a '*Diadyoin*', on the analogy of the Diatesaron written by Tatian; but on B. H. Streeter's hypothesis¹⁰ more than two writings were combined.

The dual trend towards a multiplicity of Gospels and towards the reduction to a single Gospel underlies the whole of the subsequent development: on the one hand, Gospels are produced in vast numbers; on the other, a process of reduction or rejection becomes inevitable. But the difference from the apostolic age is that the increase in the number of Gospels is no longer conditioned primarily by the legitimate endeavour to pass on the testimony of the incarnate Lord more perfectly than before, but by all kinds of purely secular interests in legendary details, such as had already existed on the periphery of the earlier development of the Gospel tradition, but which now became predominant; and as the connection with the apostolic traditions weakens with the passing of time, so the results of the new trend become more and more questionable.¹¹ Therefore the tendency to reduce the number of Gospels is intensified and comes increasingly to the forefront as the idea of the canonical validity of Christian writings assumes more definite shape.

A logical reduction would have consisted in an outright return to one particular Gospel. And, in fact, only one Gospel was in use in some Churches long before the canon was finally settled. There is reason to believe that only the Gospel of Matthew was at all widely read in Palestine, that there were Churches in Asia Minor which only used the Gospel of John from the very outset, that in Egypt only the Gospel of the Egyptians was accepted as valid among the Gentile Christians.¹²

⁹ The form-historical enquiries into the oral tradition have admittedly made it very doubtful whether the *logia* source is really a written source.

¹⁰ B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, 1930.

¹¹ See Karl Ludwig Schmidt, *Kanonische und apokryphe Evangelien und Apostelgeschichten (Abhandlungen zur Theologie des A.u.N.T., 5)*, 1944.

¹² Clem. Alex., *Stromata*, I, 9, 63; III, 13, 93; Origen, *Hom. I. on Luke* (IX, 5). The Hebrew Gospel mentioned by Clem. Alex., *Stromata*, II, 9, 45 and V, 14, 96, and Origen, *Comm. on John* 2, 12.87 (IV, 67) was probably the only Gospel used by the Jewish Christians in Alexandria, as is also assumed by W. Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

It should now be easier to understand why the establishment of four canonical Gospels became such a problem. Why did the logical solution of reducing them to a single Gospel not prevail? From the historical point of view it should be noted that the mutual *rapprochement* of the various Churches, some of which took one Gospel as the norm, some another, contributed to the reduction not being carried out consistently but stopping as it were halfway at four Gospels.

The main theological explanation of this development, however, is the legitimate concern that we have seen to be the principal reason for the tendency to multiply the Gospels in the early period: the conviction that none of the Gospels had recorded the whole wealth of Christ as revealed in the incarnate Lord. The original tendency to a multiplicity of Gospels worked against the tendency to unity, so that some reduction took place but not a reduction to a single Gospel.

There is the additional factor that apostolicity was required as the criterion of authenticity. The example of Bishop Serapion of Antioch shows how in the last resort not only the name of the author but the actual content determined whether a Gospel was to be considered apostolic or not.¹³ Purely legendary growths and Gnostic speculations formed the main tendency of most of the Gospels written between 150 and 200. This inevitably strengthened the desire to accept into the canon the few Gospels which displayed a really apostolic outlook and could be guaranteed to go back to the apostolic age. Thus it came about that the Gospels of Mark and Luke, which were only indirectly apostolic, were included in the canon as well as Matthew and John. It should be stated at once that this assessment of the Gospels of Mark and Luke was theologically correct, however accidental the grouping together of the four Gospels inevitably appeared. That the grouping of several Gospels in the canon was the theologically correct solution will be even more apparent when we have seen how false was the basic approach from which the attempt was made to replace this plurality of canonical Gospels by a single Gospel. On the other hand, we shall also see the falsity of the attitude which Irenaeus adopted to defend the fourfold Gospel.

¹³ Eusebius, *H.E.*, 6.12. Confiding in the apostolic name, the Bishop had first allowed the reading of the Gospel of Peter. On closer investigation, however, he ascertained that the contents were of a Gnostic character and forbade its use.

(3) *The Various Attempts to replace the Four Gospels by a single one*

One way to eliminate the multiple Gospel was the one indicated by the evangelists of the apostolic age: to create a new Gospel. But the spiritual justification for such an undertaking which still existed in the apostolic age was lacking later on. In the post-apostolic age one of the purposes behind these endeavours was to supplant other Gospels. Thus we hear of a εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Βασιλίδην.¹⁴ It is not clear, however, if this was a harmony produced intentionally by Basilides or whether he claimed to have written an independent Gospel in the manner of the old evangelists, making a critical use of his predecessors' work. The fact that he maintained that he was in the direct succession of the apostles, through Glaucias, Peter's interpreter,¹⁵ suggests the probability of the second hypothesis. In contrast to the old Gospels, however, this was very likely an early example of deliberate resistance to the plurality of the Gospels.

The same is true of the Gospel of Peter which was written in Syria probably about the middle of the second century. The fact that it was attributed to Peter is typical of the intention that lay behind it. We have seen that the four old Gospels—with the exception of the Gospel of John—were not ascribed to any particularly outstanding apostle. A Gospel that went out under the name of Peter, the spokesman of the apostles, would be likely to supplant all the others from the very outset and achieve such a degree of canonical authority that the other Gospels might well seem quite unnecessary.

In the same way we find the criterion of apostolicity combined with the tendency to unity in the title 'Gospel of the Twelve' which, according to Origen,¹⁶ contains an apocryphal Jewish-Christian Gospel.¹⁷ All twelve apostles were claimed to be responsible for the one Gospel. It is a document which claims to be independent, though in fact it keeps quite close to the Gospel of Matthew. Thus it was possible for one of the well-known old Gospels to take the place of the fourfold Gospel which was already becoming established. The fact that, as we have seen, a single Gospel had been used

¹⁴ Origen, *Hom. I on Luke* (IX, 5).

¹⁵ Clem. Alex., *Stromata*, VII, 106.4.

¹⁶ *Hom. I on Luke* (IX, 5). The fact that Origen uses the genitive and not κατὰ is probably not intended to weaken his assertion regarding the authorship, as has sometimes been thought.

¹⁷ See H. Waitz, *Z.N.T.W.*, 1912, p. 388 f.; A. Schmidtke, *Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen zu den judenchristlichen Evangelien*, 1911; Waitz, *Z.N.T.W.*, 1937, p. 60 f.

from the very beginning in some areas made this all the easier. But whereas previously this use of a single Gospel had not been connected with any polemical intention, the exclusive preference for one of the four signified a deliberate rejection of the other three. In the same way the Gospel of John was played off against the Synoptics. Overbeck¹⁸ and Harnack¹⁹ have pointed out that by its very nature this Gospel 'tolerated no other gods beside it'.²⁰ The Muratorian canon reproduces a legend about the origin of the Gospel of John which could only have been originally intended to commend the fourth Gospel as *the* Gospel. According to the legend, John invited the other apostles to fast with him for three days. They were to tell one another what was revealed to them during this fasting. In the same night Andrew dreamt that John was to write down everything in their name and all the other disciples were to check what he wrote. Obviously the idea of the legend was to endow the Gospel of John with the combined authority of the twelve apostles and so make all other Gospels unnecessary. We learn from Irenaeus²¹ that in Docetic circles—we do not know which—only the Gospel of Mark was recognized and among the Ebionites only the Gospel of Matthew.²² The best known of all the attempts to confer exclusive authority on one of the four Gospels is that of Marcion. He singled out the Gospel of Luke as the one exclusively valid Gospel.²³ On the other hand, according to Tertullian,²⁴ he did so 'in order to smash it to pieces'. In fact, he was convinced that by his 'purifying of the text' he had restored the one original Gospel which Paul had received from Christ.²⁵

What is particularly important for us, however, is that he gave classical expression to the principle that there could be only one Gospel. As chief witness he quotes the apostle Paul, who speaks of the Gospel in the singular in Romans 2.16, thereby clearly indicating that anything apart from the one Gospel must be a forgery.²⁶

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 481 f.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

²⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, III, 11.7 says the Valentinians favoured the Gospel of John. On the other hand, Irenaeus writes (*ibid.*, III, 11.9) that they had a Gospel of their own, which they called '*evangelium veritatis*'.

²¹ *Adv. Haer.*, III, 11.17.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Irenaeus, *ibid.*, and Tertullian, *Adv. Marcionem*, 4.2.

²⁴ Tertullian, *ibid.* Marcion also considered the connection of this Gospel with the name of Luke a falsification.

²⁵ See Harnack, *Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*, 2nd edn., 1924, p. 39 f.

²⁶ Origen, *Comm. on John*, 5.7 (IV, 104 f.).

Origen was quite right to refute this exegesis, which was also adopted by Celsus.²⁷ But it shows that the sagacious Marcion clearly saw a widely-felt problem, though he solved it heretically by applying the all-too-consistent logic which was so typical of him.

In his Gospel harmony, the so-called Diatessaron, Tatian took quite a different line, though it had already been traced out to some extent in the old Gospels of the apostolic period. In this case the single Gospel was attained not by creating a new Gospel or by singling out one of the old Gospels, but by blending the four undisputed Gospels into one. This amalgamation was not brought about by a mere juxtaposition of our Gospels—a method that was considered inappropriate—but by harmonizing them. We have seen that, strictly speaking, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are themselves Gospel harmonies. The new factor in Tatian's attempt is that he concentrates quite deliberately on harmonizing the four Gospels, and evidently intends to supplant the four canonical Gospels. It is still not quite clear if his secondary purpose was to work into the harmony other traditions to which he had access or even a fifth Gospel, or whether the deviations of certain of his narratives from our four Gospels are due to his use of a text different from ours. Many other problems of literary criticism arising from the Diatessaron still await solution.²⁸ This is not the place to deal with them, however.

That we are right to regard the plurality of the Gospels as one of the problems of the early Church is proved not so much by Tatian's experiment in itself as by its great success. The old Arabic translation as well as the Dutch translation discovered in 1923²⁹ suggest that the Diatessaron must have circulated far beyond the confines of the Syriac Church. The authoritarian action which Theodoret was forced to take in the fifth century (confiscation of all copies of the Diatessaron) in order to replace the Diatessaron by the four separate Gospels³⁰ also shows that the fourfold Gospel was not yet taken for granted.

Tatian's attempt to produce a Gospel harmony was not the only

²⁷ *Contra Cels.*, 2.27. According to him the Christians had treated the Gospel 'like drunkards' by 'recoining it three and four and many times'.

²⁸ The Greek fragment from Dura discovered in 1935 has raised anew the question whether the original language was Greek or Syriac. See C. H. Kraeling, *A Greek Fragment of Tatian's Diatessaron from Dura*, 1935.

²⁹ It is based on an old Latin translation. See D. Plooij, *The Liège Diatessaron*, 1929.

³⁰ Theodoret, *Haer. fab. comp.* I. 20. See F. C. Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, 1904.

one. We hear that Bishop Theophilus of Antioch also combined the four Gospels in a harmony.³¹ Unfortunately not a trace of this has been found. As already mentioned, it is impossible to know for certain how far Basilides's Gospel represents an intentional harmony, like Tatian's, or, as seems more probable, claimed, like the older Gospels, to be based on traditions and special knowledge of its own.³²

(4) *The Basic Error of the Forcible Attempts to reduce the Number of the Gospels*

In the last resort all the various attempts to replace the four Gospels by a single Gospel originated in a basically Docetic tendency which overlooked the fact that the Gospel had to be recorded by several writers in the apostolic period, since it was impossible for this revelation, which claims to be more than mere biography, to be reproduced by one person in all its fullness. Gospels are intended not simply to state historical facts, but to proclaim a revealed religious truth based on historical facts. The revelation took place, however, on the human level. It is, therefore, Docetism to be scandalized by the fact that there is apparently no deeper reason why the oldest Gospels to come down to us were written by these four particular men. The plurality of the Gospels, the fact that there are four Gospels, is simply an expression of the human way in which the Gospels originated. That the revelation is clothed in this completely human garb; that the unity, the one divine εὐαγγέλιον of Christ resides within the human multiplicity of the four Gospels: this is just what the New Testament means by faith. It is the same faith that confesses that the man Jesus of Nazareth is Christ, that the Church which consists of sinners represents the body of Christ.

It is no mere accident that the men who were responsible for the various attempts to replace the four Gospels by a single Gospel upheld a conception of Christian teaching differing from the New Testament, and were therefore heretics: Basilides, the Valentinians, the author of the Gospel of Peter, Marcion, Tatian. They were all Gnostics, that is, more or less Docetists, and it is also no accident that Irenaeus mentions that the 'Docetists' only recognized one Gospel, that of Mark. We shall see, however, that even the oldest

³¹ Jerome, *Ep.*, 121, 6.15.

³² But it might be permissible, from a purely historical point of view, to regard the liberal 'Lives of Jesus', examined and rejected by Albert Schweitzer, *mutatis mutandis*, as attempts undertaken with the modern resources of scholarship to create a scientifically valid Gospel harmony.

justification of the fourfold Gospel, which derives from Irenaeus, is based on the same fundamental error as the Gnostics' arguments against it.

(5) *The False Reasons for the Fourfold Gospel propounded by Irenaeus*

The pains which Irenaeus took in this matter³³ demonstrate once again how necessary it was to defend the fourfold Gospel in the early Church—obviously it was still widely felt that the number had been chosen quite arbitrarily. But the way Irenaeus solved the problem was precisely the way it ought not to have been solved. He tried to show that the fourfold Gospel was in no way based simply on the historical situation of the Apostolic Church, but that the number four was a divinely ordained number essential to salvation. The fourfold Gospel tallied with the significance of the number four in all the divine institutions of creation and redemption. The world was governed by the number four: there were four points of the compass, four main winds. Thus the Church, which was dispersed throughout the world, must rest on four pillars, in other words, the four Gospels. The whole scheme of salvation was based on the divine number of four. God had bestowed four covenants on man: the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and Christ. Irenaeus dwells, however, with special affection on the four living creatures of Ezekiel (1.10) and the Revelation of John (4.7) in which he sees a representation of the four Gospels—an idea, by the way, which was to influence Christian art, though later on the parts of the four beasts were distributed differently among the evangelists.³⁴ By means of an exegesis which is quite subtle in parts, the Gospel of John, which begins with the glorious story of how Christ was begotten from the Father, is connected with the 'royal' beast, the lion; the Gospel of Luke, which has a priestly character (Zechariah!, the fatted calf of Luke 15.23!) is connected with the young bull; the Gospel of Matthew, which begins with the genealogical tree of the human race, is associated with the beast that had a man's look; and the 'short and swiftly moving' Gospel of Mark is likened to the eagle. And so Irenaeus concludes: 'The beasts are fourfold; the Gospel is fourfold; the divine scheme of salvation is fourfold.' 'Since God made all things to number, so the Gospel had to be written thus and had to be based on a certain number.'

³³ *Adv. Haer.*, III, 11.8.

³⁴ See T. Zahn, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, II, p. 257 f.

Irenaeus, therefore, represents the fourfold Gospel as a miracle. He tries to show that it is not based on a purely human situation at all. But this line of argument leads him into dangerous waters. For it means that at bottom he admits that purely human circumstances were left out of account when the Gospels were formed into a group. He fails to appreciate the fact on which the plurality of the Gospels was based even in the apostolic age: the fact that the immeasurable fulness of the truth about the Christ who appeared in the flesh cannot be exhausted by the evangelists, because they are only humanly imperfect instruments of the divine revelation, and that it was absolutely necessary for all the available records of the life of Jesus, deriving from apostolic times, to be collected. Irenaeus failed to see that this stumbling-block of the humanly inadequate communication of divine revelation must be accepted, since, according to the New Testament, it is the beginning and end of the Christian faith that God became man in Jesus, and his Church on earth is made up of imperfect human beings involved in a process determined by historical circumstances.

(6) *The Theologically Correct Reasons for the Fourfold Gospel*

The problem under discussion cannot be solved by the artificial theory of a miraculous origin of the Gospel canon exempt from human agency. In the face of these false solutions one is bound to admire the astonishing historical and theological assurance with which the Church proceeded when it settled on the fourfold canon. It abstained from seeking for uniformity in the writings of the evangelists. It simply held fast to all the Gospels from the apostolic age to which it had access, and without any hesitation it put two more or less representative apostles alongside two less-well-known figures from the apostolic age. It accepted this lack of uniformity and the risk of arousing the impression that the whole procedure was based on mere chance. It did not merely rely on the authors' names but, as we learn from the story of Bishop Serapion³⁵ and indirectly by comparing our four canonical Gospels with the apocryphal Gospels, it examined the contents of the various lives, thereby interpreting the postulate of apostolicity correctly. The efforts to establish the formal apostolicity of the four Gospels which soon began in the Church may be regarded as an attempt to confirm the rightness of the original judgment.

³⁵ See above, n. 13.

Besides his theologically valueless speculation on the fourfold Gospel Irenaeus provides a valuable hint regarding the correct theological argument for the fourfold canon, which consists in seeking the uniformity of the Gospel in the material itself, that is to say, in the one Gospel which the individual evangelist sees, from a different angle. Irenaeus writes that 'the fourfold Gospel is sustained by the *one* Spirit: ἐνὶ πνεύματι συνεχόμενον.³⁶ There is also a reference to this fundamental uniformity in the Muratorian Canon which is much nearer the mark than the legend about the origin of the Gospel of John which is preserved in the same document: 'Even though different beginnings are recorded in the Gospels, this need not have the slightest effect on the beliefs of the faithful, since everything is explained by the one Spirit that informs all of them.' In the same vein Origen replies to Marcion's assertion, which was adopted by Celsus, that there could only be one written Gospel, apart from which all others must be forgeries,³⁷ by saying that 'it is one Lord who is preached by all'.³⁸

The description of the Gospels as εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Μαθθαῖον, κατὰ Μάρκον, κατὰ Λουκᾶν, κατὰ Ἰωάννην,³⁹ which had probably become current by the middle of the second century, best does justice both to the true unity of the four Gospels and the necessity of having a number of different authors. It is a question of combining different witnesses to the one Gospel.

This argument in favour of a plurality of Gospels is in accord with the results of modern research into the historical origins of the Gospel tradition which we owe to form-criticism. According to this, the early evangelists were merely collectors of a tradition created by the Church and its needs. These needs of the early Church were the basis of the true unity of the oral tradition. This does not necessarily cut out the literary individuality of the various evangelists. But that individuality must not be measured by the criteria of secular writing. The ecclesiastical argument for the fourfold Gospel, as expressed in the headings to the Gospels with their reference to the common subject-matter, is only intelligible if it is realized that our Gospels are not biographies, not 'memoirs of the apostles', as

³⁶ *Adv. Haer.*, III, 11.8.

³⁷ See above, n. 26.

³⁸ *Comm. on John*, 5.7 (IV, 104 f.). On Origen's attitude to the Gospels see the fundamental work by Einar Molland, *The Conception of the Gospel in the Alexandrian Theology*, 1938.

³⁹ It is generally assumed now that κατὰ signifies direct and not merely indirect authorship.

Justin wrongly calls them, but just testimonies to the faith, all of which originated in one and the same oral tradition of the early Church seen from different points of view.⁴⁰

Four *biographies* of the same life could not be set alongside one another as of equal value, but would have to be harmonized and reduced to a single biography in some way or other.⁴¹ Four Gospels, that is, four books dealing with the content of a faith, cannot be harmonized, but require by their very nature to be set alongside one another. And in any case the faith cries out for manifold witness.

⁴⁰ In this connection Karl Ludwig Schmidt also refers to the headings of the Gospels in *Le problème du christianisme primitif*, 1938, p. 23.

⁴¹ On the difficulty which was felt with regard to the books of the Chronicles owing to their parallelism to the books of the Kings, when the Hebrew canon was being settled, see above, p. 41.

3

The Tradition

The Exegetical, Historical and Theological Problem

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. And their eyes were opened and they knew him. They said to each other, Did not our hearts burn within us . . . while he opened to us the scriptures?

LUKE 24.27, 31, 32.

Translated from *La Tradition*, 1953, Neuchâtel

Foreword

THE VERY HIGH LEVEL and the objectivity of almost all Catholic reactions to my book on St. Peter¹ encourage me to continue the ecumenical debate in the same spirit of candour and honesty. Later I hope to take up again the main themes of the discussion arising out of that book. But here, as a preliminary to that, my aim is to present the results of my study of the problem of the tradition. This question, as Père Daniélou has rightly observed,² is closely connected with the subject of my book on St. Peter. Thus these two works are complementary one to the other: that on St. Peter raises the problem of the tradition, that on the tradition the problem of St. Peter.

In September 1949 I read a paper entitled 'Kyrios as Designation for the Oral Tradition concerning Jesus (*Paradosis* and *Kyrios*)' to the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* at Oxford.³ Since this was a strictly exegetical study, I made hardly any reference to the dogmatic problem of 'scripture and tradition'. But in June 1952 a group of Catholic and Protestant friends invited me to address them on this very question. The paper read on that occasion has been published,⁴ and Père Daniélou has written a reply to it,⁵ in which, while strongly opposing my arguments, he preserves throughout an admirable spirit of scientific objectivity. Although his arguments do not all seem to me to have the same force, most of his objections are interesting and instructive and, in my opinion, are a contribution to progress in the debate.

In this reply, as in most of the Catholic reviews of my book on St. Peter, one argument especially is brought forward: scripture, a collection of books, is not sufficient to actualize for us the divine revelation granted to the apostles. I believe the answer to this is to

¹ *Peter: Disciple—Apostle—Martyr*, E.T., 1953.

² *Dieu vivant*, no. 24, p. 115.

³ Published in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1950, p. 180 f., and in *R.H.P.R.*, 1950, p. 12 f.

⁴ In *Dieu vivant*, no. 23, p. 47 f. (and, as 'Scripture and Tradition', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1953, p. 113 f. [Ed.]

⁵ 'Réponse à Oscar Cullmann', *Dieu vivant*, no. 24, p. 107 f.

be found in the former of my two articles mentioned above. For this reason I have adapted it to fit the plan of the present work of which it now forms the first section and, so to speak, the foundation. The second and third sections reproduce the substance of my article 'Scripture and Tradition', but on almost every page account is taken of criticisms of the article in its original form made by Catholic scholars and especially by Père Daniélou in *Dieu vivant*.⁶ Thus the present synthesis of my earlier writings on the tradition represents a new orientation, but the main theses remain unchanged.

I should like, in conclusion, to repeat the wish expressed in the preface of my book on St. Peter, which I have seen to a considerable extent already realized. This is that the present discussion, without arousing false hopes or illusions, should really bring us together by our common effort to seek the truth in obedience to Christ, and by the sincere desire to understand one another better, without reserve, but also without forgetting that, on whichever side we stand, we call upon the same Lord.

⁶ Henceforth abbreviated as Daniélou, 'Rép'.

The Tradition

The Problem

On the old problem of 'scripture and tradition' everything possible would seem to have been said. In taking it up here my purpose is to turn the debate in a particular direction. I wish to show that the New Testament speaks very positively of a tradition, namely, the tradition of the apostles, while it resolutely rejects the so-called explanatory tradition which the rabbis placed alongside and even above the Old Testament scriptures. In other words, I wish to apply the problem of scripture and tradition to the apostolic and post-apostolic tradition. I use the term 'apostolic' in its strict historical sense, and not in the extended sense often given to it by Catholic scholars who identify apostolic and ecclesiastical tradition.⁷

Firstly, I shall try to prove that the New Testament regards the Lord exalted to the right hand of God as the direct author of the tradition of the apostles, because he himself is at work in the apostolic transmission of his words and deeds. Secondly, by examining the conception of the apostolate, I shall attempt to determine the connection between the apostolic tradition and the post-apostolic tradition and the difference between them. Thirdly, I shall enquire whether this distinction is confirmed by the history of the early Church, and whether, in creating the canon, the Church itself deliberately separated apostolic from ecclesiastical tradition, so as to make the former the norm of the latter.

(1) *The Apostolic Tradition and the Lord exalted to the right hand of God (Paradosis and Kyrios)*

The work of the form-critics on the Gospels has directed our attention more than ever before to the development of the oral

⁷ See J. N. Bakhuizen van der Brink, *Traditio in de Reformatie en het Katholicisme in de 16^e eeuw. (Medelingen der Kon. ned. Ak. van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde, N. R. XV, 1952)*, p. 28. This important work on the sixteenth-century controversy points out other distinctions to be made in the use of the word 'tradition' or 'traditions', especially that between *traditio activa*, which is a function of the Church, and *traditiones passivae*, i.e. the formulae themselves. The writer thinks agreement is possible on the former, which, in the view of the Reformers, is confirmed by scripture.

tradition which preceded the fixing of our Gospels in writing. Whether the Gospel material was, at least partially, already written down in smaller collections of single or several words of Jesus or of narratives about him, or whether, as with the oldest Jewish traditions, it was only transmitted orally, is not a question of primary importance here. Besides, it would be impossible to determine with any exactness the contents of such collections. That is also true, as M. Dibelius has rightly stressed, of the much-quoted Q source.⁸ Accordingly, the whole stream of tradition, whether oral or written, in so far as it is not yet channelled in our Gospels, is to be handled as a unit.

When we speak of the traditions in the early Church, we must constantly bear in mind the parallel in the Jewish tradition of the rabbis. We shall see that the apostle Paul used exactly the same Greek word, παράδοσις, which was familiar to him from his Jewish past as the pupil of Rabbi Gamaliel. But Jesus rejected in a radical manner the *paradosis* of the Jews. How, then, could Paul without more ado apply this apparently discredited notion to the moral precepts and doctrines which the early Church regarded as normative?

The problem is still further complicated by the fact that, instead of 'tradition', Paul sometimes says 'the Lord' (*Kyrios*), as, for example, in quoting words of Jesus (I Thess. 4.15; I Cor. 7.10, 25; 9.14).

In I Corinthians 11.23 he joins these two expressions when he writes: 'I received (the tradition) from the Lord'. There follows the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper: 'The Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed . . . 'Εγὼ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου. Why 'from *Kyrios*'? Why not 'from the Church'?

This passage is usually, but wrongly, treated in isolation, and has given rise to two different interpretations. The one maintains that the passage is not concerned with tradition in the usual Jewish sense, which would necessitate the presupposition of a chain of successive human intermediaries, from whom Paul received the account, but that it is a question of a direct, immediate revelation from the Lord. This came to Paul in a vision, just as in Galatians 1.12 he asserts that he has not received the Gospel from men, but by a direct revelation, an *apokalypsis*—an obvious reference to Christ's appearing on the road to Damascus. This interpretation was given by Lefèvre d'Étaples, followed by Bengel in his *Gnomon*. More recently it has

⁸ *From Tradition to Gospel*, E.T., 1934, p. 233 f.

been taken up with special emphasis by F. Godet,⁹ by A. Loisy,¹⁰ who wrongly regards this whole passage as an interpolation, and by W. Heitmüller.¹¹ The French deniers of the historical existence of Jesus, P. L. Couchoud¹² and P. Alfaric¹³ have used the same explanation in support of their theories. They believe that they can find in this passage a sort of classic example of the one source of stories about Jesus: Paul had a vision, and made its content into history.

If this interpretation of I Corinthians 11.23 is right, that is, if the words 'I received from the Lord' mean 'I received the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper directly in a vision from the Lord', then this passage will have nothing to do with the problem of 'the tradition' which we are discussing. It will not deal at all with transmission of tradition in the Church.

However, the great majority of scholars of all shades of opinion agree that this interpretation is not accurate, and that the words: 'I received from the Lord' do not exclude the normal transmission of tradition in the Church. I mention here H. Lietzmann,¹⁴ J. Weiss,¹⁵ E. B. Allo,¹⁶ J. Héring,¹⁷ R. Bultmann.¹⁸ Also M. Goguel has shown, against the deniers of the historical existence of Jesus already mentioned, that in reality these words presuppose a historical transmission of the facts.¹⁹

There is, then, agreement among many scholars of different schools and even confessions. But if this interpretation is correct, why does Paul use the surprising expression 'from the Lord' in referring to a tradition he has received from the Church? Here, though differing a little in detail, the various interpretations more or less agree that with the preposition *ἀπό* Paul points to the

⁹ *Commentaire sur la première Épître aux Corinthiens*, ii (1887), p. 160 f.

¹⁰ 'Les origines de la Cène eucharistique' (*Congrès d'histoire du christianisme* i, p. 77 f.).

¹¹ 'Zum Problem Paulus und Jesus', *Z.N.T.W.*, 1912, p. 321.

¹² *Le mystère de Jésus*, 1924, p. 141.

¹³ 'Le Jésus de Paul', *R.H.P.R.*, 1927, p. 276 f.

¹⁴ *An die Korinther I-II* (*Handbuch zum N.T.*), 4th edn. by W. G. Kümmel, 1949, p. 57, and see Kümmel's note, p. 185.

¹⁵ *Der erste Korintherbrief* (*Krit. exeg. Kommentar zum N.T.*), 1910, p. 283.

¹⁶ *Première Épître aux Corinthiens*, 2nd edn., 1934.

¹⁷ *La première Épître de saint Paul aux Corinthiens* (*Commentaire du N.T.*), 1949, p. 100.

¹⁸ *Theology of the New Testament*, E.T., vol. i, 1952, p. 150.

¹⁹ 'La relation du dernier repas de Jésus dans I Cor. 11 et la tradition historique chez l'apôtre Paul', *R.H.P.R.*, 1930, p. 61 f.

chronological origin of the whole presupposed chain of tradition, and the words 'I received it *from the Lord*' mean 'I received it through a chain of tradition which *begins* with the Lord'.

This solution of the difficulty will have to be tested, but first it must be pointed out that this is a hypothesis and that we are bound to use a hypothesis in the attempt to answer this question why the words ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου are used in this particular case. I wish, however, to propose a somewhat different hypothesis. I agree with the great majority of scholars that I Corinthians 11.23 does not refer to a vision, but to a tradition of the Church; but I differ as regards the words 'from the Lord', which I shall attempt to interpret within the framework of the whole problem of *paradosis* in the New Testament. I shall show that, seen in this perspective, the designation *Kyrios* can be understood as not only pointing to the historical Jesus as the chronological beginning and the first link of the chain of tradition, but to the exalted Lord as the real author of the whole tradition developing itself within the apostolic Church. This hypothesis best explains St. Paul's direct identification of the apostolic *paradosis* with *Kyrios*: the Lord himself is at work in the transmission of his words and deeds by the Church; he works through the Church.

This idea is assumed already in Chrysostom's interpretation of our passage, when he writes (*Hom.* 27.4): 'For today also it is the same one who produces and delivers everything, even as at that time'. This statement of his, however, needs qualification. The text of Paul does not justify the attribution to the Lord of all later Church tradition till 'today'. Nevertheless, as regards the *apostolic* tradition, Chrysostom seems to have defined correctly the connection in the New Testament between *paradosis* and *Kyrios*.

The course of our argument in this chapter will now be as follows. In the first section we shall undertake to show that for Paul the *paradosis*, in so far as it refers to the confession of faith and to the words and deeds of Jesus, is really Church tradition which has a parallel in the Jewish *paradosis*.²⁰ In the second section we shall bring out the relation of this tradition to the direct *apokalypsis* of the Lord to the apostles. In the third section we shall examine this

²⁰ This point seems important because J. Daniélou ('Rép.', especially p. 110 f.) is inclined to reserve the word 'tradition' for the post-apostolic tradition, and to call the apostolic tradition 'revelation'. While justifiable to a certain extent in principle, this use of the words seems to me to lack precision. The objective revelation is the person and work of the incarnate Christ.

conception of *paradosis* against the background of Pauline theology and see if it is paralleled in Johannine thought. Finally, in the fourth section, we shall discuss the relation between this tradition and the apostolic office.

(a) Jesus and the early Church lived in an atmosphere entirely permeated with the concept of tradition. Rabbinic interpretation of scripture had been placed more and more as a norm alongside and even above scripture. Jesus rejected this whole παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων as the work of men which, instead of explaining scripture, set it aside (Mark 7.3 f.; Matt. 15.2). The slogan of pious Jews was 'hold fast the tradition' (κρατεῖν τὴν παράδοσιν, Mark 7.8). Jesus took it up in his ironical saying: 'You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men' (Mark 7.8).

But in the Pauline epistles we find the whole Jewish *paradosis* terminology, and, what is more, we find it used in a definitely positive way, as in the exhortation to the Thessalonians: 'Hold the traditions' (κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις, II Thess. 2.15). Also we find the other expressions connected with the idea of tradition used very like technical terms: the synonym for κρατεῖν: κατέχειν (I Cor. 11.2; 15.2); 'stand in the tradition' (στήκετε, I Cor. 15.1; II Thess. 2.15); and especially 'receive' and 'deliver' (παραλαμβάνειν, παραδίδόναι, I Cor. 11.2, 23; 15.3; I Thess. 2.13; II Thess. 2.15; 3.6; Rom. 6.17; Gal. 1.9, 12; Phil. 4.9; Col. 2.6, 8).²¹

It is a mistake to try to find the origin of these terms, as E. Norden²² does, in the language of the Hellenistic mystery religions. It is quite clear that this whole terminology is Jewish in origin. παραλαμβάνειν is the translation of the Hebrew *qibbel min*, παραδίδόναι of the Hebrew *masar le*. And the exact correspondence of the two Pauline passages in I Corinthians shows that it is a matter of purely formal expressions:²³

I Corinthians 11.23: (ἐγὼ) παρέλαβον (ἄπὸ τοῦ κυρίου) ὁ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν.

I Corinthians 15.3: παρέδωκα ὑμῖν (ἐν πρώτοις) ὁ καὶ παρέλαβον. The verbs in the principal and subordinate clauses are simply interchanged. This is because the very essence of tradition is that it forms a chain. At all events it is clear that these are Jewish formulae, by which the rabbis refer to the *halakha* and the *haggada*. In the other

²¹ On the expression φυλάττειν παραθήκην in I Tim. 6.20; II Tim. 1.14, see C. Spicq, 'Saint Paul et la loi des dépôts', *R. B.*, 1931, p. 481 f.

²² *Agnostos Theos*, 1913, p. 267 f.

²³ See J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, E.T., 1955, p. 129 f.

passages mentioned above it is sometimes Paul, sometimes the Church, which 'received'.

The word καί must also be particularly noticed, for it certainly belongs to the formula derived from the *paradosis* terminology. We find it not only in I Corinthians 11.23 and I Corinthians 15.3, but also in I Corinthians 15.1: τὸ εὐαγγέλιον . . . ὃ καὶ παρέλαβετε. E. B. Allo²⁴ has rightly pointed out that in I Corinthians 11.23 this καί must refer to the manner of transmission: 'I received the tradition in the same way as I handed it on to you—by mediation'.

This throws light also on the addition, ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, in I Corinthians 11.23, which then does not exclude mediation. Although this addition does not occur in I Corinthians 15.3 f., the form of expression is exactly parallel, and so a chain of tradition is presupposed there also. J. Jeremias²⁵ has shown that in I Corinthians 15.3 f. the content of the *paradosis*, which is introduced with this formula, is linguistically un-Pauline. This is a further indication that Paul has taken over a text already fixed before him. The same must be true of I Corinthians 11.23, even though Paul declares that he has received the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper 'from the Lord'. Moreover, M. Goguel²⁶ and recently also R. Bultmann²⁷ rightly maintain that this account could not have been written down by Paul on the basis of a vision, because it clearly represents a more developed stage of the tradition than the parallel Synoptic accounts.

But what is the *content* of the παράδοσις according to St. Paul? Firstly, moral rules which, after the fashion of the *halakha*, concern the life of the faithful (e.g. I Cor. 11.2; II Thess. 3.6; Rom. 6.17; Phil. 4.9; Col. 2.6)²⁸; secondly, a summary of the Christian message expressed as a formula of faith and uniting facts of the life of Jesus and their theological interpretation (e.g. I Cor. 15.3 f.); and lastly, single narratives from the life of Jesus (e.g. I Cor. 11.23).

The primitive *paradosis* probably consisted of a summary of the *kerygma*. But by the time of Paul the tradition had gone a step further

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 311.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 129 f.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 150.

²⁸ J. J. von Allmen has dealt in particular with the rules of sexual and conjugal morality transmitted by Paul as elements of the tradition (*Maris et femmes d'après saint Paul* (Cah. théol. 29, 1951), p. 20, n. 4). Cf. also E. Hirsch, 'Eine Randglosse zu I Cor. 7', *Zeitschr. f. syst. Theol.*, 1925, p. 50 f., who in places approaches our thesis.

and now also had as its subject words of Jesus and narratives from his life. As regards the words of Jesus, this tradition appears already very advanced. They must have played a more important role than the relatively small number of words of Jesus quoted by Paul (I Thess. 4.15; I Cor. 7.10; 9.14) would lead us to suppose. The way in which Paul uses these words, especially in I Corinthians 7, proves that the *paradosis* of these words was already very extensive and sharply marked out: he clearly distinguishes between the instructions which he himself gives as an apostle and those which the Lord gives. Especially instructive is verse 25, where he says that on the subject of virgins he has no instructions from the *Kyrios*. Since Paul emphasizes that in this particular case he has no words of the Lord at his disposal, we may presume that in general the *paradosis* contained such words dealing with the most detailed aspects of conduct.

At any rate it is certain that the words of Jesus which Paul takes from the *paradosis* belong to the same class as the kerygmatic formula in I Corinthians 15.3 and the story from the life of Jesus in I Corinthians 11.23.

All these are cases of traditions which the apostle has received from others and hands on, just as the rabbi received and handed on the traditions of the interpretation of the law.²⁹ The authority with which the rabbi transmits tradition has here passed over to the apostle. The *tanna* of the Jews is replaced by the *apostolos* of Christ. When, as Paul says, he went to Jerusalem to meet the apostle Cephas (Gal. 1.18), it is more than likely that his object was to receive tradition from him.³⁰ For just as one rabbi could only receive tradition from another rabbi, so one apostle can only receive tradition at first hand from another apostle. It is true that Paul did not go to Jerusalem until three years after his conversion, but very probably while at Damascus he had already become acquainted with the apostolic traditions as they circulated in that area. It is impossible, however, to distinguish with certainty what traditions Paul may have received at Jerusalem, Damascus or Antioch, and

²⁹ See on this P. Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Catechism*, 1940, p. 67 f.

³⁰ P. H. Menoud, 'Revelation and Tradition: The Influence of Paul's Conversion on his Theology', *Interpretation*, 1953, p. 131 f., insists that since Paul's revelation on the Damascus road amounted to a *christological* affirmation, he was bound to combine this revelation with the tradition about Jesus for which he had to refer to those who alone could give it to him. This is correct. But I wish to point out that the connection between revelation and tradition is closer still, because both go back to the same Lord.

we must reckon with all three possibilities.³¹ Nevertheless, it must be understood that the legitimate agent of the tradition is the apostle—not only one of the Twelve, but apostle in the wider sense of an eye-witness, one who ‘had seen the Lord’. When Marcion cut out the words *ὁ καὶ παρέλαβον* in I Corinthians 15.3, he did so because he interpreted them as implying Paul’s dependence on the Twelve—an interpretation which, in principle, is correct.

The analogy of the Jewish tradition raises the question whether all these traditions about Christ (*kerygma*, words of Jesus, narratives) ought to be considered as the sole true interpretation of the law of the Old Testament. This at any rate seems to be indicated by the words *κατὰ τὰς γραφάς* in the traditional formula in I Corinthians 15.3 f. And so we must ask *whether Jesus Christ the ‘Lord’, as the fulfilment of the law, does not take the place of all Jewish paradosis.*

If so, we understand the fact with which we began, and which is by no means intelligible in itself, that Paul applied to the Christian message the very concept of the *paradosis* which Jesus so decisively rejected. For in Christ alone can there be a tradition which is not *παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων*.

This brings us to our main problem: How is Paul able to designate the tradition concerning Jesus as *Kyrios*?

(b) A contradiction has long been felt between Galatians 1.12, where Paul emphasizes that he did not receive his Gospel ‘from man’ and passages where he appeals to traditions which he can only have received through mediation. Calvin sought to resolve the difficulty of Galatians 1.12 by suggesting that in Acts 9.10 f. Ananias plays the part of a human mediator, and remarked that direct divine revelation and human mediation, which God uses, go together. But, in my view, the connection is closer than this.

Modern exegetes try to solve the apparent contradiction by distinguishing between historical facts and their theological interpretation. The facts Paul was able to discover only through human mediation; what was revealed to him by a direct *apokalypsis* from the Lord was the theological understanding of these facts, in other words the ‘gospel’ of which he speaks in Galatians 1.12.

This distinction may stand in itself. In the previous section we have described the content of the *paradosis* as the summary of faith, words of Jesus, and single narratives. Now we can add the *εὐαγγέλιον* as interpretation of the facts in the sense of Galatians 1.12. But this

³¹ J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 131, for instance, assigns the tradition in I Cor. 11.23 f. to the Church of Antioch, J. Héring, *op. cit.*, p. 100, to the Church of Damascus.

is not to be regarded as one element alongside others, since neither Paul nor the early Church made a conscious distinction between different elements of the *paradosis*. Confirmation of this is to be found in the combination of facts and theological interpretations such as we find in the formula of I Corinthians 15.3 f. Here Paul clearly attributes *both* to tradition, and we cannot claim that he received the facts alone through human intermediaries and their interpretation through direct revelation. Of course, Galatians 1.12 does not deal with facts, but with their kerygmatic interpretation. Nevertheless, interpretation implies the facts, just as these include interpretation.

This is confirmed by the particular *paradosis* which Paul in I Corinthians 11.23 expressly states he has received 'from the Lord'. At first sight this phrase suggests that this *paradosis*, like the revelation on the road to Damascus, is going to be a case of theological interpretation; whereas in reality it is a factual account of the last meal of Jesus. Thus we understand why Paul is not aware of any contradiction when he says that he has received his gospel without human intermediaries, despite the fact that he refers to traditions which have been transmitted to him.

Most critics take the words 'from the Lord' to mean that the Lord is merely the first link of a chain to whom others have succeeded up to Paul. 'The Lord', then, is the historical Jesus and not the exalted Lord. In support of this explanation, which is at present the most popular one, it is generally argued that Paul does not use here the preposition παρά, as is usual with the verb παραλαμβάνειν, but από. But this argument is not as weighty as is usually supposed, for the difference between παρά and από is not fundamental in this case. If it is said that από indicates only the *direction* of the origin, and not the *immediate* origin, the same can apply to παρά. Besides, there is at least one example in Paul where από unquestionably denotes the *immediate* origin of a communication, Colossians 1.7: 'as you learned from Epaphras' (ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ).

In actual fact, then, it is the exalted Christ who is meant, and not the historical Jesus. And yet Paul is not thinking of a special vision nor of the revelation on the road to Damascus, as H. Lietzmann agrees when he says that for Paul 'everything he has heard about Jesus before and after his conversion is fused together and appears to him as a single stream flowing from the revelation at Damascus'.³² As in I Corinthians 15.3 f., Paul is using a tradition handed down

³² Op. cit., p. 57. Cf. also *Messe und Herrenmahl*, 1926, p. 255.

to him by intermediaries. The formula of I Corinthians 11.23 refers to the Christ who is present, in that he stands behind the transmission of the tradition, that is, he works *in* it. The words ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου can quite well mean a direct communication from the Lord, without it being necessary to think of a vision or to exclude intermediaries through whom the Lord himself transmits the *paradosis*. In the last section of this chapter we shall show that these intermediaries are the apostles, and that their essential function is to be bearers of direct revelation, one being concerned with one fact, another with another, so that they are dependent upon one another. But it is the united testimony of all the apostles which constitutes the Christian *paradosis*, in which the *Kyrios* himself is at work.

In this way we can understand why both the tradition of the words of Jesus and that of narratives of his life are attributed to the exalted Lord. *Kyrios*, when introducing the words of Jesus, is not to be understood otherwise than as in I Corinthians 11.23, which is a narrative. This is also confirmed by Colossians 2.6: 'you received (by tradition, παρελάβετε) Christ Jesus the Lord'. The context deals with instructions of Christ according to which the faithful should 'walk' (περιπατεῖν), and in verse 8 this *paradosis* is expressly distinguished from all 'tradition of men' (παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων) as it is spread abroad by the heretics. In Colossians 2.6 the *Kyrios* appears as the content of the *paradosis*, but he is at one and the same time *its content and its author*.

This conclusion is also to be drawn from the use of the present tense in I Corinthians 7.10: 'To the married I give charge, not I, but the Lord' (παραγγέλλω). Chr. F. Baur drew attention to this present tense. *It is the exalted Lord who now proclaims to the Corinthians, through the tradition, what he had taught his disciples during his incarnation on earth.*³³

It is true that the historic tense, the aorist, διέταξεν, is found in I Corinthians 9.14 (in I Thess. 4.15 the question cannot be definitely decided, but the words λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου presuppose likewise the past tense). The alternation between the present and the aorist shows, in this case also, that the exalted Lord and the earthly Jesus are regarded as one and the same person. The exalted Christ himself, after his resurrection, delivers the words he had spoken during his incarnation. In addition one could mention that the verb

³³ There is an analogy in Eph. 4.21, where the readers are referred to Christ *whom they have heard* (εἶγε αὐτὸν ἠκούσατε), although they never met him in Palestine.

παράγγελλω in I Corinthians 7.10 contains the preposition παρά which is characteristic of the *paradosis* terminology, and that for this reason Paul may have chosen this verb deliberately.

In his study of εὐαγγέλιον, which is important for our subject, E. Molland,³⁴ following J. Schniewind,³⁵ has shown that in the expression εὐαγγέλιον Χριστοῦ, in Romans 15.19 and other passages, the genitive Χριστοῦ is subjective, so that here again appears the same complex fact of which we are speaking: the risen Christ is himself the author of the gospel, of which he is also the object. He is both subject and object.

Our conclusion is that the resolution of the difference between Paul's claim to have received the gospel directly from the Lord and the fact established in our first section that he received παραδόσεις from others consists in the belief that the exalted Christ himself stands as transmitter behind the apostles who transmit his words and works. Paul can place on the same level the revelation on the road to Damascus and the apostolic tradition he has received, because in both Christ is directly at work.

(c) It now remains to inquire whether this conception of the *Kyrios* as the author of the *paradosis* of Christ is basic to Pauline theology and whether it is also attested in the rest of the New Testament.

First of all it must be remembered that, according to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus himself had a definite conception of the παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων and of its relation to scripture. He contrasted it as a παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων with the 'commandment of God' (Mark 7.8). Does he thereby intend to condemn all interpretation of scripture? On the contrary, the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount prove that he replaces the interpretation offered by the 'elders' by his own which 'fulfils' the ultimate intention of the divine will contained in each commandment. W. G. Kümmel³⁶ rightly emphasizes that by the words ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν Jesus opposes to the *paradosis* of the rabbis, which he rejects, the definitive and only valid *paradosis*, namely, the messianic *paradosis*. The former is *paradosis* of men, while the latter, the foundations of which he himself lays in the Sermon on the Mount, has as its author him who speaks as *ego* with the authority of the Messiah. He, the

³⁴ *Das paulinische Evangelium*, 1934, p. 100.

³⁵ *Die Begriffe Wort und Evangelium bei Paulus*, 1910, p. 110. Cf. also *Evangelion. Ursprung und erste Gestalt des Begriffs Evangelium*, 1927.

³⁶ 'Jesus und der jüdische Traditionsgedanke', *Z.N.T.W.*, 1934, p. 105 f.

Messiah, as the one who fulfils the law, takes the place of the παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων. It can rightly be maintained that, according to the Synoptic testimony, Jesus himself is the sole *paradosis*.

In the extant epistles Paul nowhere draws this conclusion from the attitude of Jesus to the law, but a direct line of connection is nevertheless discernible between the statements of Jesus and Paul's idea of Jesus as the end (τέλος) of the law. In his recent book W. D. Davies³⁷ has brought out very clearly the idea of Christ as the new law. For Paul, Christ the Lord takes the place of the law. This does not mean that he regards Jesus as *first* the lawgiver or the interpreter of the law, and *consequently* as the incarnation, in his own person, of the new, the messianic law. On the contrary, for Paul, Christ is above all in his person and work the fulfilled new law, and from this is derived his role of lawgiver as one who in his words imparts new *halakhoth* and gives instruction by the example of his life (Phil. 2.5). The latter idea is subordinated to the former, but without there being any opposition between them.³⁸

Paul develops the conception of Christ as the new law in II Corinthians 3.4 f. Here it is not Christ but Paul himself who is put on a parallel with Moses. Paul is the 'minister' of the 'new covenant', just as Moses was the minister of the old; but in the new covenant Christ takes the place of the law in the old. To be sure, already in the old covenant the divine *doxa* shone through the law, so that it was reflected in the face of its mediator Moses; but this reflection was only transient, and so Moses put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel should not see this glory passing away. In Christ this veil is taken away (verse 16); in his person the divine glory is visible for all, and verse 18 says that the ministers of this new covenant with unveiled face reflect the divine glory which does not pass away, and that this happens 'from the Lord the Spirit' (ἐπὶ κυρίου πνεύματος).

This reference to the Holy Spirit which lies at the basis of this whole contrast between the old and new covenants in II Corinthians 3 (γράμμα—πνεῦμα) is important for our question. It points to the end-time fulfilled in Christ. Ultimately, according to Jeremiah 31.33, the law will be written in men's hearts; at that time, too, the Holy Spirit will come. Both promises are realized in Christ: he is

³⁷ *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 1948, especially p. 147 f.

³⁸ H. Windisch, *Der Sinn der Bergpredigt*, 1929, wrongly contrasts Matthew and St. Paul in this respect.

the new law, and he is also the Spirit.³⁹ It is not accidental that this bold identification of the Lord and the Spirit stands precisely in this passage about the law (verse 17). Because the Holy Spirit imparts himself, the law can now be inscribed in men's hearts. *Henceforth the Holy Spirit, who is identical with the Kyrios, takes the place of the paradosis of the law.* The revelation of the divine glory which is the result (ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, verse 18) takes place καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος. Of course, the whole of this passage deals only with the interpretation of the law, but there is a line of connection leading to the tradition of the early Church, as we realize when we consider that everything which concerns Christ is ultimately fulfilment of the Old Testament, and when we remember the analogy, including the terminology, between the Christian tradition and the rabbinic tradition.

This, then, appears to be the theological background of our suggested interpretation of the relation between *Kyrios* and *paradosis*. The *Kyrios* Christ replaces the *paradosis* of the law, and imparts himself also, in connection with this function, as Holy Spirit. This explains how the exalted Lord can be active in the actual transmission of the apostolic tradition of his words and works.

Paul does not establish the connection between the ideas of II Corinthians 3 and the tradition of the words and life of Jesus. But the fourth Gospel does; its concern is precisely with the relation between the historical Jesus and the risen Lord. The farewell discourses bring to expression the line of thought which I recognize in Paul, but as an implicit assumption. The passages which most clearly express the notion that the Holy Spirit will impart to the apostles the teachings of the historical Jesus are John 16.13 and 14.26: 'the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance *all that I said to you*'.

If my interpretation of the Pauline conception of the connection between *Kyrios* and *paradosis* is correct, we have before us an idea which, while not everywhere fully thought out in the same way, can yet be regarded as quite widespread in the early Church.

(d) On several occasions we have been led to emphasize the role belonging to the apostle, because of his unique function as a witness, in transmitting the *paradosis* of the *Kyrios*. In II Corinthians 3 the apostle and the Holy Spirit are both spoken of as replacing the

³⁹ C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel*, 1943, p. 55 f. has seen this clearly; cf. *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, 1936, *passim*.

mediators and interpreters of the law of the old covenant. Of course, the Holy Spirit is not a gift reserved for apostles alone. The passages from John mentioned above (16.13 and 14.26), while addressed only to apostles, do not perhaps point solely to them. The Holy Spirit is not reserved for them. Nevertheless, in the transmission of tradition proper, an exceptional place belongs to them as the eye-witnesses commissioned directly by Christ. What distinguishes the *paradosis* of Christ from the rabbinic principle of tradition is this: firstly, the mediator of the tradition is not the teacher, the rabbi, but the *apostle* as direct witness; secondly, the principle of succession does not work mechanically as with the rabbis, but is bound to the Holy Spirit. We shall now deal with these two points.

We have seen that in Galatians 1.12 Paul expressly denies having received the gospel from men. This is fundamental for his apostolic authority. As apostle, as witness, he must stand in direct relation with the Lord. The unique honour of the apostle is that he has received a direct *apokalypsis*. But this concerns not only the theological understanding of the history of salvation, but also the facts of this history in themselves. We may think of the resurrection to which the apostles are to testify as to an actual fact (Acts 1.22; I Cor. 9.1). For the Twelve it is a question besides of testifying to the events which took place in the period when the incarnate Jesus 'went in and out' among them (Acts 1.21). From this point of view the above-mentioned distinction between the communication of facts and the communication of their theological meaning loses still more its justification, for both are revealed to the apostle by the Lord, and of both he is a direct witness.

In early Christianity the word 'apostle' is used in two senses: in the wider sense it denotes simply an eye-witness of the resurrection of Christ, in the narrower sense a member of the group of the Twelve who must bear witness not only to Christ risen but also to Christ incarnate on earth. Consequently every apostle is not able, as a direct eye-witness, to pass on information about *all* the facts. Paul himself cannot report, as an eye-witness, the events of the earthly life of Jesus. And yet he is an apostle since he can give direct eye-witness evidence of the risen Lord whom he has seen and heard on the road to Damascus. For the other events he must rely on the *eye-witness testimony of the other apostles*. We may recall here his meeting with Cephas in Jerusalem (Gal. 1.18), as well as the *paradosis* of I Corinthians 15.3 f., where he makes a clear distinction between the Easter event proper as transmitted by the testimony of other

apostles, and the appearance granted to him. It must not be overlooked that in this very passage, after quoting the *paradosis*, he stresses in verse 11 his agreement with the original apostles.

It can now be understood how, in virtue of a real sense of community created by the function of an apostle as witness to Christ, all tradition passed on by apostles could be regarded as directly revealed by Christ. Thus Paul can say that he has received 'from the Lord' a tradition which in reality he has received by way of other apostles. *Transmission by the apostles is not effected by men, but by Christ the Lord himself who thereby imparts this revelation.* All that the Church knows about words of Jesus, about stories of his life, or about their interpretation, comes from the apostles. One has received this revelation, another that. The apostle is essentially one who passes on what he has received by revelation. But since everything has not been revealed to each individual apostle, each one must first pass on his testimony to another (Gal. 1.18; I Cor. 15.11), and only the entire *paradosis*, to which all the apostles contribute, constitutes the *paradosis* of Christ.⁴⁰

In a wider sense the whole apostolic Church performs this function of passing on tradition; and in actual fact the primitive *kerygma* was handed on in this way. At the same time it must be remembered that the theological foundation of the tradition rests on the apostolic office. R. Bultmann rightly remarks that the conception of the apostolate in the early Church was determined by the idea of tradition.⁴¹

Just as the Jewish tradition comes through the *tannaim*, so the tradition about Jesus comes through the apostles. It is no accident that in the very key-passages for the *paradosis* of Christ, above all Galatians 1.12 and I Corinthians 15.3 f., the apostolate is always dealt with at the same time.

This is also how the pronoun ἐγώ in I Corinthians 11.23 is to be understood: 'I (the apostle) received from the Lord . . .' Attention has rightly often been directed to this *ego*, but it has rarely been explained satisfactorily. Paul could certainly have put this pronoun in the parallel passage, I Corinthians 15.3. The reason why he does so only in I Corinthians 11.23 is that it was vital, in opposition to the false conception of the Lord's Supper current at Corinth, to stress the dignity of his apostolic office as bearer of the correct tradition.

⁴⁰ The legend that each of the apostles contributed an article to the so-called Apostles' Creed points, in its own way, to the same idea.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

In I Corinthians 7.10 ἐγὼ is contrasted with the *Kyrios*, but it is the same ἐγὼ of the apostolic consciousness. Here Paul points out that even in cases where the *Kyrios* does not give exact instructions in a *logion* handed down by tradition, the apostle is entitled to give his own opinion. That this ἐγὼ may be regarded as that of the apostolic claims is clear from verse 25: 'Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy'. This grace to be trustworthy refers to the apostolic office.

This trustworthiness is manifested in a double function: on the one hand, faithfully to transmit the *paradosis* about Jesus—that is the meaning of ἐγὼ in I Corinthians 11.23; on the other, to give judgments which are inspired by this *paradosis*, and go beyond it, but must be entirely subordinated to it—that is the meaning of the same pronoun in I Corinthians 7.10. The ἐγὼ in this passage derives its authority from that in the first, where the apostle is the legitimate and authorized mediator of the *paradosis* of Christ.

While the Jewish rabbi passes on in what might be called an automatic succession of rabbis the παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, which is, for that very reason, only 'tradition of men' (Mark 7.8), the apostle needs the Holy Spirit and his own call to enable him to perform the task of handing on tradition. In the apostolic age there was not yet any contradiction between succession and Holy Spirit.⁴² In Judaism the activity of the rabbi marked the end of prophecy, the end of direct inspiration of the Spirit. The rabbi followed the prophet. The apostle also transmits tradition, but his office depends on the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason the function of the apostle respecting the tradition can be traced back ultimately to that of the *Kyrios* himself, who is the πνεῦμα (II Cor. 3.17). At the beginning of this chapter we asked how Paul could ascribe such high honour to the concept of *paradosis*, when Jesus had rejected tradition as a work of men contrary to the divine commandment in such terms that the very idea of a revelation vouchsafed by way of tradition seemed completely excluded. We have shown that the early Christian view was that a παράδοσις τῶν ἀποστόλων is not a παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων. On the contrary, the *Kyrios* himself controls its transmission, so that there is no antithesis between apostolic tradition and direct revelation. In Colossians

⁴² This is not the case in Jewish Christianity; cf. H. von Campenhausen, 'Lehrreihen und Bischofsreihen im zweiten Jahrhundert', *In memoriam E. Lohmeyer*, 1951, p. 240 f., and also his recent book referred to below, p. 94, n. 62.

2.6-8 Paul distinguishes between the legitimate *paradosis* about Christ Jesus the Lord (παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον) and the tradition of men by using the expression παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων to describe the Gnostic traditions.

Our conclusion, then, is that on the ground of the New Testament there can be only one legitimate tradition, that which is transmitted by the apostles and is designated as *Kyrios*.

Does this favourable estimate of the apostolic *paradosis* justify the attribution of the same normative import to later ecclesiastical *paradosis*? The Catholic Church claims that it does; and this is because it identifies the authority of the post-apostolic Church which preserves, transmits and interprets the apostolic message with the authority of the apostles.⁴³ But is this identification justified? In order to answer this question we must inquire into the relation of the apostolic office to the Church.

(2) *The Significance of the Uniqueness of the Apostolate*

The problem of the relationship between scripture and tradition can be viewed as a problem of the theological relationship between the apostolic period and the period of the Church. All the other questions depend on the solution that is given to this problem. The alternatives—co-ordination or subordination of tradition to scripture—derive from the question of knowing how we must understand the fact that the period of the Church is the continuation and unfolding of the apostolic period. For we must note at the outset that this fact is capable of divergent interpretations. That is why agreement on the mere fact that the Church continues the work of Christ on earth does not necessarily imply agreement on the relationship between scripture and tradition. Thus in my thesis developed in *Christ and Time*, as well as in my studies on the sacraments in the New Testament, I came considerably nearer to the 'Catholic' point of view. In fact, I would affirm very strongly that the history of salvation is continued on earth (*through the Church*). I believe that this idea is present throughout the New Testament, and I should even consider it the key to the understanding of the fourth Gospel.⁴⁴

⁴³ Cf. J. Daniélou, 'Rép.', p. III: 'In this transmission and interpretation of the message, the Church enjoys a divine, infallible authority as did the apostles as recipients of revelation.'

⁴⁴ *Les sacrements dans l'évangile johannique*, 1951. [English readers may consult Cullmann's *Early Christian Worship*, E.T., 1953, Ed.]

I would maintain, moreover, that the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist take the place in the Church of the miracles performed by Jesus Christ in the period of the incarnation. And yet I shall show in the following pages that I subordinate tradition to scripture. *Vice versa*, certain 'Catholic' expositions of the unique role played by the period of the apostles in the story of revelation seem to come curiously near to the 'Protestant' point of view. And yet their authors co-ordinate and resolutely set side by side scripture and tradition by regarding the latter as an infallible interpretation of the former and at the same time as a more complete expression of apostolic teaching. This means that it is necessary to define exactly the temporal relationship to which I have referred.

The time within which the history of salvation is unfolded includes the past, the present, and the future. But it has a centre which serves as a vantage-point or norm for the whole extent of this history, and this centre is constituted by what we call the period of direct revelation, or the period of the incarnation. It comprises the years from the birth of Christ to the death of the last apostle, that is, of the last eye-witness who saw the risen Jesus and who received, either from the incarnate Jesus or the risen Christ, the direct and unique command to testify to what he had seen and heard. This testimony can be oral or written.

All the separate parts of total time derive their meaning from these few years of the revelation. If we want to assign to them a date in accordance with secular chronology, we can only do so approximately, because we do not know the precise year of the birth of Christ or of the death of the last apostle. We can say, however, that they are the years from about the year 1 to the year 70 or 80 of our era, without these being taken as exact limits—all the less so as the witness of certain apostles was fixed in writing only after their death.

If we consider the Christian faith from the point of view of time we should say that the scandal of the Christian faith is to believe that these few years, which for secular history have no more and no less significance than other periods, are the centre and norm of the totality of time. This is a scandal of which our usual manner of reckoning the years from the year 1, regarded as the year of Christ's birth, can be considered as a symbol. It is only from the starting-point of the events of these central years that faith sees the history of salvation unfolding in two directions, backwards and forwards, within secular history. It is only in the light of these years that it

speaks of the history of a chosen people which moves towards the incarnation of Christ. It is only in the light of these years that it awaits a fulfilment of all things linked to a return of Christ, and it is above all in the light of these years that it believes, in the present time, in a Church as the body of Christ by which he exercises now his dominion over the universe.

The problem of scripture and tradition concerns the place we give to the period of the Church with reference to the period of the incarnation. This period of the Church is part of the history of salvation. We would deliberately underline this over against a narrow Protestant position which does not assign to the period of the Church any value *sui generis* in the history of salvation, and which recognizes no other possibility of being a Christian than that of living in the past time of the incarnation and the apostles. This is to fail to recognize that Christ reigns now and that the Church is the centre of his universal reign.

But this is not enough. Like every other period in the history of salvation, the period of the Church must be defined and determined from the centre. Just as the past appears to us as the time of preparation (the 'old' covenant), and the future as that of the final fulfilment, so the period of the Church is the *intermediate* period. It is intermediate because, while the decisive event has already taken place, the final fulfilment is yet to come. The miracles of the years 1-70 continue to happen, and yet neither the absolute of the central period nor the absolute of the fulfilment is realized: it is an essentially intermediate period. The Church shares in this intermediate character. It is indeed the body of Christ, the resurrection-body, but being composed of those who are still sinners, it is not simply the resurrection-body. It remains at the same time an earthly body which can not only be crucified, but shares in the imperfections of all earthly bodies.

The period of the Church, then, is a prolongation of the central period, but it is not the central period: it is a prolongation of the period of the incarnate Christ, but it is not the period of the incarnate Christ and of his apostolic eye-witnesses. The Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles, and will continue to be built upon this foundation as long as it exists, but in the present period it can no longer produce apostles.

Indeed, the apostolate is by definition a unique office which cannot be delegated. According to Acts 1.22 the apostle is a unique, because direct witness of the resurrection. Moreover, he has received

a direct command from the incarnate or risen Christ. Like the Jewish *shaliach* he is 'as him that sent him'. He cannot transmit to others his completely unique mission. After having discharged it he gives it back to him who entrusted it to him, Christ. That is why in the New Testament the apostles alone fulfil exactly the functions which belong to Christ himself. The missionary charge that Jesus gives them in Matthew 10.7 f. corresponds exactly to the mission which in his reply to John the Baptist (Matt. 11.6) he assigns to his own person as Messiah: to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to raise the dead, to preach the good news. That is why the New Testament attributes the same images as are applied to Jesus to the apostles: 'rocks', and the corresponding images of 'foundation' and 'pillars'. Never are these images used to describe the bishop.⁴⁵

The function of the bishop, which is transmitted, is essentially different from that of the apostle, which cannot be transmitted. The apostles appoint bishops, but they cannot delegate to them their function, which cannot be renewed. The bishops succeed the apostles but on a completely different level. They succeed them, not as apostles but as bishops, whose office is also important for the Church, but quite distinct. The apostles did not appoint other apostles, but bishops. This means that the apostolate does not belong to the period of the Church, but to that of the incarnation.

The apostolate consists in the witness given to Christ. Of course, the Church also bears witness to Christ. But it cannot bear that direct witness which belongs to the apostles. Its witness is a *derived* witness, because it does not rest on the direct revelation which was the privilege of the apostle alone as an *eye-witness*.

The epistle to the Galatians makes the clearest and most explicit distinction between the preaching of the apostle and the preaching of those who depend on the apostles (Gal. 1.1, 12 f.). The apostle alone has received the gospel δι' ἀποκαλύψεως (Gal. 1.12) and not δι' ἀνθρώπου (Gal. 1.12)—by direct revelation without human intermediary. Paul agrees with his Judaizing opponents on this point: an apostle is one who has been called by Christ *without the intermediary office* of another, in other words, outside the succession of a tradition. The Judaizers taunted Paul with having received the gospel through others and therefore refused him the title of apostle. Paul denies this stoutly, but he implicitly acknowledges that he would not be an apostle if he had not received the gospel *directly*

⁴⁵ For full details and bibliography see O. Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple—Apostle—Martyr*, E.T., 1953.

from Christ. We have seen ⁴⁶ that this by no means contradicts his reliance on the tradition designated as *Kyrios*, independently of this direct call and this direct revelation. But it is inherent in the very nature of this apostolic tradition that each of the apostles has received a direct call and with it a direct revelation of the risen Christ.

To affirm thus the unique character of the revelation given to the apostles is not to deny the value of all post-apostolic tradition,⁴⁷ but it is to bring it clearly down to the level of a human fact, even though the Holy Spirit can reveal himself through it also. I have shown above that there is an apostolic tradition, and this is identified with the *Kyrios* himself. The apostles compare their testimonies; for the richness of the revelation demands a plurality of apostolic testimonies, as it demands a plurality of written Gospels, and they transmit to one another their unique apostolic testimonies. We have here a tradition, a *paradosis*, which does not fall under the condemnation which Jesus pronounces on *paradosis* in general. There is one normative tradition, that of the apostles considered in its diversity as a unity.

No writing of the New Testament emphasizes so much as the fourth Gospel the continuation of the work of Christ incarnate in the Church. Its very object is to set forth this continuation. But it is this very Gospel which distinguishes clearly between the continuation by the apostles, which is part of the central period, and the continuation by the post-apostolic Church. The high-priestly prayer (chap. 17) establishes this line of descent: Christ—the apostles—the post-apostolic Church. The members of the last are described as those who *believe because of the word of the apostles* (John 17.20).

I have already said that the uniqueness of the apostolate is emphasized, forcibly so, by Catholic theology, but it seems to me that at the decisive moment it does not draw the necessary conclusions. For if one thinks through this important idea of the uniqueness of the apostolate, one necessarily gets to the point of making an essential difference, also from the point of view of tradition, between *the foundation of the Church*, which took place in the period of the apostles, and the *post-apostolic Church*, which is no longer that of the apostles but of the bishops. There is consequently a difference between apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition, the former

⁴⁶ Above, p. 66 f.

⁴⁷ On the practical value of post-apostolic tradition I hope to write elsewhere in detail.

being the foundation of the latter. They cannot, therefore, be co-ordinated.

If the apostolic tradition ought to be considered as the norm of revelation for all time, the question arises: how can we make alive for ourselves this witness which God condescended, for the salvation of the world, to grant to the apostles at a period which we call the mid-point, the centre of time? The Catholic Church replies: by the apostolic succession, by the infallible teaching-office of the Church, by means of the later, post-apostolic tradition. Thus the objective revelation of God comes to us (1) through the apostles, (2) through the ecclesiastical tradition which hands down and makes explicit the witness of the apostles. But is the *uniqueness* of the apostolate a guarantee of any such thing? It rests, as we have seen, on the immediate character of the revelation granted to the apostles, on the fact that it did not come to them through any intermediary, but δι' ἀποκαλύψεως (Gal. 1.12). The apostle cannot, therefore, have any successor who can replace him as bearer of the revelation for future generations, but he must continue *himself* to fulfil his function in the Church of today: *in* the Church, not *by* the Church, but *by his word*, διὰ τοῦ λόγου (John 17.20), in other words, by his *writings*.

The oral and written word of the apostles is, of course, not identical with the objective revelation, with the divine Word itself, since human language—spoken and written—shares in our weakness, and consequently cannot be an adequate vehicle for the Word pronounced by the omnipotent God. But it is only by this means which is accessible to us that God can speak to us, and he chose the apostles in order that the good news might be transmitted to us through their testimony.⁴⁸ In order that *other* human elements should not find entrance into this testimony, the apostolate has this character of uniqueness which can only be safeguarded by the *writings* of the apostles. These writings maintain, on the one hand,

⁴⁸ J. Daniélou's objection ('Rép', p. 110), then, does not seem well founded: he says that I speak of apostolic tradition as a theologian, and of ecclesiastical tradition as a historian. On the contrary, I concede that in *both* the Holy Spirit is at work and that in *both* there is the human element inherent in all tradition. Nevertheless, the apostolic tradition alone is the norm, and this for a theological reason. This I stress also over against G. Bavaud, 'Écriture et Tradition selon M. Cullmann', *Nova et Vetera*, 1953, p. 138, who likewise asserts that, quite contrary to the 'liberal' Protestant, who refuses to abase his reason as a 'philosopher' (as regards the Bible), the 'orthodox' Protestant he sees in me is ready to abase his reason as a 'philosopher', but not as a 'historian' (as regards the authority of the Church).

the uniqueness of their mission and, on the other hand, they ensure the direct action of the apostles upon us in the twentieth century.

Since it thus pleased God to *restrict* the transmission of the gospel to this one category of the contemporaries of Jesus, in order to *reduce to a minimum* its deformation by the human element, should the Church not do everything in its turn to respect this reservation? We shall see that the Church of the second century understood this necessity in creating the canon of the New Testament and in taking care to admit only writings of which it could guarantee the *apostolic* origin.

The fixing of the revelation granted by God to the apostles as eye-witnesses took place at the very period which we have called the mid-point of time, the centre of the history of salvation. No word pronounced or written later by other men belonging to the Church was to be placed alongside the apostolic writings which, if not all written by the apostles themselves, nevertheless all claim to be the immediate expression of their testimony as eye-witnesses.

The written witness of the apostles is for us the living element which continually brings us anew face to face with Christ. If we realize the magnitude of this miracle—the *unique* ministry of the apostles who lived at the time of the incarnation actualized in our midst in the twentieth century, not by ourselves or certain of our contemporaries, but by these first-century apostles themselves—we can no longer speak of the dead letter of the Bible. Yet this presupposes that we share the faith of the first Christians, that the apostles are not writers like other authors of antiquity, but men set apart by God for the execution of his plan of salvation by their witness, first oral, then written.

Again and again the Catholic objection is that books cannot confront us with Christ as is the case with the infallible teaching-office of the Church, where the Holy Spirit operates in bringing out the implications of the tradition. This argument recurs in most Catholic reviews of my book on St. Peter.⁴⁹ But the conclusion reached in the preceding chapter is that in the New Testament the *Kyrios* Christ *is present* in the tradition of the apostles, and therefore also in this tradition as fixed in the written documents. The believer holds that these documents are not simply historical records (although they are that), but that the Holy Spirit confronts the believing reader directly with Christ.

The scriptural principle, then, is not, as one might think, a simple

⁴⁹ And in that of J. Daniélou in *Études*, 1953.

application of the scientific principle stressed by the Renaissance, of the necessity of resorting to the sources in order to study and understand a historical phenomenon.⁵⁰ On the contrary, it is based on faith in this essential fact of the history of salvation—the setting apart, at the time of the incarnation, of the apostles as unique instruments of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. But it is true that through the natural consequences which it implies for theological method the scriptural principle meets the scientific motto—back to the sources. This is the meeting-ground of historical science and Protestant theology.

If we believe with the first Christians that the divine institution of the apostolate had as its purpose the direct transmission of the revelation of God in Christ, by the elimination of all other intermediaries as an inevitable source of deformation, we ought to respect God's plan by reserving to the apostolate this same function in the contemporary Church. The real presence of the apostles in the Church of all periods is given to us in the New Testament. But we shall find it in so far as we seek direct contact with these witnesses and eliminate the intermediaries.

Does this mean that the Church in which we are set by Baptism is not for us the place where the Holy Spirit is at work? This conclusion would be contrary to the faith attested by all the New Testament writings. On the contrary, according to this faith, the Holy Spirit who had previously been reserved for certain men of God became accessible after Pentecost to the whole community of believers. We must take seriously this conviction of primitive Christianity. It implies that the work of the incarnate Christ is carried on in his Church, and the history of salvation continues. There is no gap between the ascension of Christ and his return. The fourth Gospel was written to show that in leaving the world Christ did not abandon it. The Holy Spirit is at work in it. There will still be miracles of faith, as in the period of the incarnation, as in the period of Jesus and the apostles. And the great miracle of the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ is given to the Church in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

I have been accused, in my attitude to the tradition, of being unfaithful to my own conception of the sacraments in which I acknowledge the present activity of God, because I deny the

⁵⁰ Against J. Daniélou, 'Rép.', p. 110, who describes my attitude as 'the return to the sources, the need of contact with the original document behind the subsequent glosses'. Cf. the last note but one above.

infallibility of the Church's teaching-office and tradition.⁵¹ But can the sacraments and an infallible teaching-office be placed on the same level? I fail to see any justification for this. Infallibility and error are not categories which are applicable to the sacraments. Of course, both in the sacraments and in tradition there is divine activity in the present. The sacraments are an actualization of the work of Christ, but in exactly the same way as in the time of the apostles who observed them as we do. On the other hand, as regards revelation, Catholic scholars are bound to admit that there is a fundamental difference between the apostles and the post-apostolic Church, because in the Church there is no fresh revelation. As regards the sacraments, through their very nature there is no difference between the period of the apostles and that of the Church. I do not, therefore, think that there is any inconsistency between my opposition to the doctrinal infallibility of the teaching-office of the Church and my conception of the sacraments.

We could go still further. Inspiration through the Holy Spirit continues also in the sense that the Paraclete is the Spirit of Truth.⁵² And yet the high-priestly prayer makes a clear distinction between the apostles and those who believe 'because of their word'. Perhaps it is for this reason that the fourth Gospel reports a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit which took place before that in Acts, on Easter day itself, and was experienced by the apostles only (20.22). The revelation of the Word of God continues in the Church, but it will no longer be a *norm* or *criterion*, like the revelation granted to the apostles. Despite the deep gulf between them in other respects, is it not true to say that the Catholic Church, Gnosticism, and ancient and modern sects which claim a superior enlightenment, are at one in denying that scripture is a superior norm for the testing of the genuine activity of the Holy Spirit? The Church will examine every later revelation, individual or collective, but will always take as criterion this norm of the apostolic witness. The Church will therefore not be a superior tribunal able to decree what must be added to this norm. *God speaks to the Church of today through the witness of the apostles.* As long as there is a Church this witness of the apostles will be a *sufficient norm*.

⁵¹ See J. Daniélou, 'Rép.', p. 114.

⁵² Here I omit a sentence which stood in my article in *Dieu vivant*, no. 23, p. 54 (and in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1953, p. 120 [Ed.]): 'There will still be revelation', for I think it gave rise to a misunderstanding on the part of J. Daniélou ('Rép.', p. 107). The word 'revelation' was there used in the sense of inspiration.

The apostolic witness has a double role: it engenders inspiration and acts as its controller, since in all inspiration there is a risk of other spirits putting themselves in the place of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Church will have the right and the duty to proclaim whatever, examined in the light of the apostolic norm, appears to it as truth. In this way an ecclesiastical tradition is elaborated. It will have great value for the Church, and Protestantism is wrong to underestimate this in principle. But in any case it recognizes it in fact by giving a large place in its teaching to the writings, for instance, of the theologians of the sixteenth century and even to the decisions of the early councils.⁵³ But whatever the respect owed by the Church to the tradition, and the importance attaching to it in the elaboration and understanding of Christian doctrine, it can never assume the same value as the apostolic norm, and it can never itself become a norm. A norm is a norm because it cannot be expanded. *Revelation and criterion of revelation* must not be confused.

In practice the institution of the apostolate, which is unique in the history of salvation, seems to us to be devalued by the infallible teaching-office of the Catholic Church. The uniqueness of the apostolate is annulled by this teaching-norm. The period of the apostles and that of the Church are confused. Of course, the Catholic Church claims only to *interpret*, to explicate the apostolic witness by its decisions which constitute the tradition. But when the ecclesiastical interpretation assumes the same normative value *for all periods* as the apostolic norm itself, does not the affirmation that it is only interpretation become a fiction? Is it not the essence of a true interpretation that it has not the same definitive character as the norm itself? Certainly we must always consult the interpretations of the norm which have been given in order to understand it, but we must always be ready to revise them, and even to abandon them, by setting ourselves before the norm itself, and removing the screen of earlier interpretations.

Moreover, does the Catholic Church not tend to abandon, in fact if not in theory, the fiction that tradition is interpretation of scripture, when in justifying the dogma proclaimed in 1950 it does not spend time giving a scriptural foundation, but relies on the *consensus* of the Church, as if collective inspiration in the Church has

⁵³ On this see the interesting article of J. N. Bakhuizen van der Brink mentioned above, p. 59, n. 7, also J. Courvoisier, 'De la réforme comme principe critique du protestantisme', *Verbum Caro*, 1953, p. 20 f., who also emphasizes the respect of the Reformers for the Church Fathers. Cf. also F. J. Leenhardt, 'Des raisons et de la façon d'être protestant', *Verbum Caro*, 1953, p. 31 f.

no longer any need at all to be controlled by the apostolic witness, and as if the infallible teaching-office of the Pope were sufficient for this purpose? ⁵⁴

None the less Catholic theology will always oppose the affirmation of the superiority of scripture to tradition by the argument that the former *needs to be interpreted*. We readily concede this necessity. For, as we have already said, the apostles used the imperfect instrument of human language, and moreover languages and thought-forms different from our own. But neither the need for interpretation nor the errors of individual interpretation justify the claim that the teaching-office of the Church is infallible. Besides, if the conception brought out in the preceding chapter of the presence of the *Kyrios* himself in the apostolic tradition is taken seriously, the watchword of the Reformers, *scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, assumes full importance. The Church ought to take more seriously, than is the case in Protestantism, the teaching-office, the duty of pronouncing as Church in matters of exegesis. The Church ought to take up a position regarding any interpretation proposed by the exegetes, and ought to pray for the help of the Holy Spirit in reaching the right decision. The Church ought to translate the biblical message into the language of today. But in doing this, the Church ought to know that it is fulfilling its duty for its own period, and is not doing something which, like the testimony of the eye-witnesses, binds all the future centuries of the period of the Church, so that future generations will be bound by its decisions in the same way as they are bound by scripture. Earlier decisions of the Church will serve as guides to the exegetes, but not as norms or criteria.

Even when there is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, there is a human element in all interpretation of scripture. This human element is present also in the apostolic writings themselves, which have transposed the divine Word into human language. But behind them there are the apostles as eye-witnesses. The human element is here reduced to an *inevitable minimum inherent in the very notion of a divine revelation to man*. I readily concede the danger of false interpretations of our own. But if we set between scripture and ourselves as a norm the total collection of official interpretations given in all past centuries by the Church, then errors which are insignificant, when considered singly, are increased by virtue of a

⁵⁴ I refer to the reality, not the theory. That in *theory* no claim is made to promulgate a new revelation I readily concede to J. Daniélou ('Rép.', p. 108) and G. Bavaud, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

development which no tradition transmitted by men who are not eye-witnesses can escape. The chronological question necessarily comes into play here: this is why the period of the Church cannot be normative like the period of the *foundation* of the Church.

Otherwise our interpretation would risk coming under the condemnation pronounced by Jesus on the tradition: 'You reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition' (Mark 7.9). The interpretation given by the rabbinic tradition to the commandment to honour father and mother was considered also to be faithful to the divine Word, and to shed light on a written commandment which was not clear in itself. And yet Jesus recommends here, as in the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount, the necessity of returning to the Word itself to get from it the divine intention without the intermediary of a traditional interpretation. The arguments with which the Jewish rabbis justified their view of tradition as a norm correspond to a considerable extent to those used by Catholic theology in support of a tradition constituted by the Roman Church's decisions in questions of dogma.

But is this not to miss the fact that everything has been changed by the coming of Christ, by the existence of a Church of Christ? Is it not a blasphemy thus to compare the tradition of the rabbis with the tradition of the Church? With this objection we return to our starting-point: the distinction which can be drawn between the period of the incarnation and the period of the Church. For to make this distinction comes to the same thing as saying that there is tradition *and* tradition. There is an apostolic tradition which is a norm because it rests upon eye-witnesses chosen by God, and because Christ speaks directly in it, and there is a post-apostolic tradition which is a valuable help for the understanding of the divine Word, but is not to be regarded as a norm. While accepting humbly the *exegetical and dogmatic directives* of the Church and its teachers, we must be ready to set ourselves directly before the testimony of the apostles, as the apostles themselves were confronted directly with the divine revelation (Gal. 1.12), without any intermediate interpretation.

It is true that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the apostles is at work in the Church, and the Church is the place where Christ manifests his presence. 'Quench not the Spirit', says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, but he knows, too, that other spirits are at work in the Church itself. That is why he adds: 'Prove all things, hold fast that which is good'. To say that inspiration needs to be controlled

is not to deny it. Equally, to say that the teaching-office of the Church needs to be controlled is not to deny it; and it must be controlled by the word of the apostles. *The Holy Spirit interprets scripture, but is at the same time controlled by it.*

(3) *The Significance of the Fixing of the Canon by the Church of the Second Century*

To determine the connection between scripture and tradition we began, in the preceding chapters, from the very foundation of the Christian Church, that is, from the period which we call the central period in the history of salvation, the period of Jesus and his apostles. By an examination of the New Testament we have found that the idea of the apostolate, or more exactly of the uniqueness of the apostolate, has led us to the answer which we have thought must be given. By centring the whole discussion on this idea of the apostolate we have only considered so far the New Testament as scripture, that is to say, the direct witness of the apostles to the fundamental facts of the work of the incarnate Christ and their own acts.

Now we are about to deal with the question from the starting-point of the history of the primitive Church, and to discover if this will confirm our results. If we have just been looking for the answer to our problem in scripture, we shall now look for it in the tradition. We shall insist on the fact that *the infant Church itself distinguished between apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition*, clearly subordinating the latter to the former, in other words, subordinating itself to the apostolic tradition.

Catholic theology, in order to combat the thesis of the superiority of scripture, lays much stress upon the chronological priority of tradition to scripture. This is a fact that no one will think of denying, provided, however, that it is made clear that it is the *apostolic* tradition which is prior. But if it can be shown that the Church itself recognized an essential difference between the tradition before and the tradition after the establishment of the canon, the fact of the priority of the oral apostolic tradition over its fixation in writing will prove nothing about the tradition as such. We shall speak first about the origin of the first Christian writings, then about the origin of the canon.

Of course, the oral tradition of the apostles precedes the first apostolic writings. The oral tradition prior to the first writings was

certainly quantitatively richer than the written tradition.⁵⁵ But we must ask what is the significance of the fact that the apostles, or the mouthpieces who served them as secretaries, at a given moment took up the pen to give this tradition a written form. This is a fact of the very greatest importance *for the history of salvation*. Its meaning can only have been to delimit the oral tradition of the apostles, so as to make of the apostolic witness in this form a definitive *norm* for the Church, at the moment when it was going to expand into the whole world and had to be built up until the Kingdom of God itself was established. If it is allowed that the oral tradition of the apostles had been entrusted as a deposit to the Church in order that, in the course of the centuries, it might draw from it normative elements of equal worth which are not to be found in the apostolic writings, then the composition of writings which have as authors men whom the Church calls 'sacred authors' is completely minimized. The writings of the apostles are devalued to the point of becoming tools, useful indeed, but in no way indispensable. In actual fact the theory of 'secret', unwritten traditions of the apostles was elaborated by the Gnostics, and the Church itself drew attention to the danger of these.⁵⁶

If, on the other hand, the written fixation of the witness of the apostles is one of the *essential facts of the incarnation*, we have the right and the duty to bring together apostolic tradition and New Testament writings, and to distinguish both from the post-apostolic, post-canonical tradition. We shall see that the rule of faith, though transmitted in oral form, was accepted as a norm alongside scripture only because it was considered as having been *fixed by the apostles*. What matters is not whether the apostolic tradition was oral or written, but that it was *fixed by the apostles*.

But did the early Church really distinguish between apostolic and post-apostolic tradition? This is the place to speak about the establishment of the canon by the Church of the second century. This

⁵⁵ This I readily concede to G. Bavaud, *op. cit.*, p. 136, who refers to II Thess. 2.15 ('hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours'), and concludes that scripture is only a part of the tradition.

⁵⁶ G. Bavaud, *op. cit.*, p. 137 f. rightly reminds us that, in Catholic teaching, the role of tradition is not only to interpret scripture, but to determine the contents of the apostolic deposit which includes oral traditions as well (I Tim. 6.20; II Tim. 1.14). I took into consideration this function of Catholic tradition in my article in *Dieu vivant*, p. 58. But I assert that the *norm* for determining this apostolic deposit (including matters of rites and institutions) is not ecclesiastical tradition, but scripture. It is here that the fundamental divergence appears.

again is an event of capital importance for the history of salvation. We are in complete agreement with Catholic theology in its insistence on the fact that *the Church itself* made the canon. We even find in this fact the supreme argument for our demonstration. The fixing of the Christian canon of scripture means that *the Church itself*, at a given time, traced a clear and definite line of demarcation between the period of the apostles and that of the Church, between the time of foundation and that of construction, between the apostolic community and the Church of the bishops, in other words, between apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition. Otherwise the formation of the canon would be meaningless.

We must recall the situation that led the Church to conceive the *idea* of a canon. About the year 150 there is still an oral tradition. We know this from Papias, who wrote an exposition of the words of Jesus. He tells us himself that he used as a basis the *viva vox* (φωνή ζῶσα) and that he attached more importance to it than to the writings. But from him we have not only this declaration of principle; for he has left us some examples of the oral tradition as he found it, and these examples show us well what we ought to think of an oral tradition about the year 150! It is entirely legendary in character. This is clear from the story that Papias reports about Joseph Barsabbas, the unsuccessful candidate, according to Acts 1.23 f., for the post of twelfth disciple rendered vacant by Judas's treason. Above all there is the obscene and completely legendary account of the death of Judas Iscariot himself.

The period about 150 is, on the one hand, relatively near to the apostolic age, but on the other hand, it is already too far away for the living tradition still to offer in itself the least guarantee of authenticity. The oral traditions which Papias echoes arose in the Church and were transmitted by it. For outside the Church no one had any interest in describing in such crude colours the death of the traitor. Papias was therefore deluding himself when he considered the *viva vox* as more valuable than the written books. The oral tradition had a normative value in the period of the apostles, who were eye-witnesses, but it had it no longer in 150 after passing from mouth to mouth.

The traditions reported by Papias are not the only ones. From the same period we have the first apocryphal Gospels, which were collections of other oral traditions. It is sufficient to read these Gospels, one of which tells of the infant Jesus making living sparrows, carrying water in his apron, and miraculously killing companions

who were annoying him, or to read the numerous apocryphal Acts, in order to realize that the tradition, in the Church, no longer offered any guarantee of truth, even when it claimed a chain of succession. For all these traditions were justified by a chain of transmission reaching back to the apostles. Papias himself also makes this claim when he says that he got his information from people who had been in contact with the apostles. The teaching-office of the Church in itself did not suffice to preserve the purity of the gospel.

By establishing the *principle* of a canon the Church recognized that *from that time* the tradition was no longer a criterion of truth. It drew a line under the apostolic tradition. It declared implicitly that from that time every subsequent tradition must be submitted to the control of the apostolic tradition. That is, it declared: here is the tradition which *constituted* the Church, which forced itself upon it.⁵⁷ Certainly the Church did not intend thereby to put an end to the continued evolution of the tradition. But by what we might call an act of humility it submitted all subsequent tradition to be elaborated by itself to the superior criterion of the apostolic tradition, codified in the Holy Scriptures. To establish a canon is equivalent to saying this: henceforth our ecclesiastical tradition needs to be controlled; with the help of the Holy Spirit it will be controlled by the apostolic tradition fixed in writing; for we are getting to the point where we are too distant from the apostolic age to be able to guard the purity of the tradition *without a superior written norm*, and too distant to prevent slight legendary and other deformations creeping in, and thus being transmitted and amplified. But at the same time this meant that the tradition that was to be considered as alone apostolic had to be fixed, for all the Gnostics boasted of secret, unwritten traditions which claimed to be apostolic. To fix a canon was to say: henceforth we give up regarding as a norm other traditions that are not fixed by the apostles in writing. Of course, there may be other authentic apostolic traditions, but we regard as an apostolic *norm* only what is written in these books, since it has been proved that by admitting as norms oral traditions not written by the apostles we are losing the criterion for judging the validity of the claim to apostolicity made by the many traditions in circulation. To say that the writings brought together in a canon should

⁵⁷ This is strongly emphasized by Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 1, p. 109 f., and, following him, by H. Diem, 'Das Problem des Schriftkanons', *Theol. Studien*, no. 32, 1951.

be regarded as a *norm* was to say that they should be regarded as *sufficient*. The teaching-office of the Church did not abdicate in this final act of fixing the canon, but made its future activity dependent on a superior norm.

The Catholic Church, to quote Père Daniélou,⁵⁸ admits 'that the fixing of the canon marks the place where revelation properly so called ceased, but it denies that the seat of authority is thereby shifted and is transferred from the living Church to the written word'. But we do not speak of transference of authority from the Church to the written word. In actual fact, there was no doctrinal authority properly so called in the period before the canon was fixed. The proof of this is the spate of apocryphal traditions, all of which sprang up within the Church itself. Among the numerous Christian writings the books which were to form the future canon *forced themselves on the Church by their intrinsic apostolic authority*, as they do still, because the *Kyrios Christ* speaks in them.

By setting up the *principle* of a canon (the fixing of its final limits came later) the Church of the second century did not only take up a position with regard to the difficulties that arose at that particular time, especially as regards Gnosticism. *It took a decision that committed the whole future*. It did not fix a norm for others, but for itself, and committed the Church for all future centuries to this norm. In doing this the Church did not deprive itself of its teaching-office. But it gave to this teaching-office its exact character: it will be truly the teaching-office of the Church in so far as it begins by submitting to the ecclesiastical norm of the canon. It derives its efficacy from this submission. The Holy Spirit will be at work in this very submission. *Within this framework* revelation will continue to be granted to the Church.

Is it legitimate to attribute such primary importance in the history of salvation to this act of fixing the canon? Does not this mean attributing an exceptional dignity to the Church of the second century which conceived this idea of a canon? It must be remembered that this was, in fact, a decisive moment for the Church. On the one hand, about the year 150 they were still near enough to the apostolic age to be able, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to make a selection among the oral and written traditions; on the other hand, the bewildering multiplication of Gnostic and legendary traditions had made the Church ripe for this act of humility in submitting *all* later inspiration to a norm. At no other time in the history of the

⁵⁸ 'Rép.', p. 109.

Church could the fixing of the canon have been undertaken. It was at that very time that God granted to the Church the grace of recognizing the difference between the period of the incarnation and the period of the Church. Only the clear distinction between these two periods enables the Church to preserve the sublime consciousness of having its own place and its own time in the history of salvation. And it has it in so far as it recognizes that the period of Jesus and the apostles is the mid-point of all time and gives its significance to every period, including that of the Church.

In creating a norm the Church did not desire to be its own norm,⁵⁹ since it had discovered that *without a superior written norm its teaching-office could not keep pure the apostolic tradition*. While remaining conscious of its high mission of representing the body of Christ on earth in the present period, the highest mission there is, it understood that it could not accomplish this mission except by submitting to the norm of the apostolic canon. If the fixing of the canon had been carried out by the Church on the tacit assumption that its teaching-office, that is, the *subsequent* traditions, should be set alongside this canon with an *equal normative authority*, the reason for the creation of the canon would be unintelligible. If after as well as before its creation the teaching-office of the Church continued to be a *supreme* norm of equal value, the Church could on its own authority alone always judge afresh as a last resort on the conformity of the teaching of its scholars with the apostolic tradition. In this case the fixing of a canon would have been superfluous. It only has meaning if the Church henceforth exercises its teaching-office in submission to this supreme norm, and continually returns to it. We might even go so far as to say, paradoxically, that the teaching-office of the Church at least approaches real infallibility in so far as, through submission to the canon, it abandons all *claim* to infallibility; and that the tradition created by the Church assumes a real value for the understanding of the divine revelation if it does not claim to be an indispensable screen between the Bible and the reader.

But the canon fixed by the Church of the second century does not contain only the books of the apostles, but also the Old Testament. At the outset it must be said that the Old Testament was admitted only because it was believed that the period of the

⁵⁹ Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 1, p. 107, puts it thus: 'In the unwritten tradition the Church is not addressed, but is engaged in conversation with itself'.

incarnation is the mid-point of time, the mid-point in the history of salvation which begins before the incarnation and continues beyond it. The Old Testament was received into the canon as the testimony to that part of the history of salvation which prepared for the incarnation. This was the way in which Jesus and the apostles understood the history of Israel. Thus the Church was faithful to the apostles themselves in admitting the Old Testament into the *apostolic norm* which is the canon.

Here an objection may be raised. Since the history of the people of God in the Old Testament thus acquires a normative character, why should it not be the same for the people of God in the New Testament, i.e. the Church? Is not a privileged position given to the period of preparation for the incarnation as compared with the period of the unfolding of the incarnation which is the period of the Church?

This objection has actually been made to me.⁶⁰ But once again the fixing of the canon must be viewed as an element in the history of salvation itself. The fixing of this norm certainly did not mean, as many Protestants think, that the history of salvation was henceforth to stop until the return of Christ, so that meanwhile all we can do is mark time. Rather, we must boldly assert that the people of the New Testament are in a privileged position as compared with that of the Old, since they already live in the new age, even though the final fulfilment is still to come. For the Holy Spirit which, in the Old Testament, is only manifested in *some* men of God, is now accessible to all the members of the Church. This is the interpretation of the miracle of Pentecost, based on the prophecy in Joel, which is given by Peter in his sermon (Acts 2.16 f.): 'in the last days . . . I will pour out my Spirit upon *all* flesh'.

And yet this period of the Church, in spite of all the graces bestowed upon it, especially in the sacraments, cannot be a *norm*. In answering the objection already mentioned, it must be pointed out that it is wrong to suggest that there is in the Old Testament an infallible teaching-office. The authority of the Old Testament must not be regarded as that of an infallible teaching-office.⁶¹ The Spirit operated in the people of Israel, but there was no infallible teaching-office. The authority of the Old Testament which, for the most part, was already regarded as canonical by the Jews, impressed itself

⁶⁰ By Père Daniélou, first in conversation, then in 'Rép.', p. 111 f.

⁶¹ It is this confusion which seems to underlie the objection of J. Daniélou, 'Rép.', p. 111 f.

on the early Church as part of the normative history of salvation through Christ, in the same way as that of the several New Testament books. The Church saw in the Old Testament the activity of the Spirit, and it is for this reason that the primitive confessions of faith lay stress on his speaking through the prophets. This means that for the Church the Old Testament is canonical only in so far as it is explicitly orientated towards the New; in other words, because the time of the incarnation is regarded as normative for the time which preceded it, and as the criterion by which it is to be understood. Thus the apostolic writings are the norm not only of the post-apostolic, but of the pre-apostolic period.

If there is a certain parallelism between ecclesiastical tradition and scripture, it only applies to the *Old Testament* scripture, because both of them have their norm and canon in the apostolic writings of the New Testament. The period of the Church, however, is *not closed* as was the case, in the age of the apostles and of the fixing of the canon, with the period of preparation for the incarnation in the history of Israel.

But, it may be asked, does not the *rule of faith* prove that ecclesiastical tradition is a norm of equal authority with scripture? In the first place, it is of the greatest importance that the idea of giving it a normative authority was conceived *at the same time* as that of giving a normative authority to the canon, that is to say, about the middle of the second century. By misunderstanding the significance of certain declarations of the Fathers of the second century we are too accustomed to contrast rule of faith and canon, as if the former constituted the continuous tradition of the Church, alongside the writings of the apostles. In fact, the definitive fixing of the apostolic rule of faith corresponded exactly to the same need of codifying the apostolic tradition as did the canonization of the apostolic writings. It is not a matter of, on the one hand, the Apostles' Creed and, on the other, their writings. The two form henceforth one block of apostolic tradition over against the post-apostolic tradition. The apostolic rule of faith is the very tradition of which the Fathers of the second century speak.⁶² What is important is not that it was first of all transmitted orally, but the conviction that its text has

⁶² Irenaeus especially should be studied from this point of view. Moreover, our work should be supplemented by a study of tradition in the early history of dogma. The problem has recently been treated in connection with the conception of the ministry in the important book by H. von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 1953, p. 163 f.

been *fixed*—just like that of the canonical books of the New Testament—by the apostles. According to the conviction of the Church of the second century it is not a question of a secret or implicit tradition, but of a text already fixed in the period of the apostles, as were their writings.

This creed was a kind of apostolic *résumé* of the books of the New Testament, as it were a rule of apostolic interpretation of all the very different books. The multiplicity of apostolic writings necessitated a short *résumé* of the truths that are common to them for the different needs of the Church.⁶³ In order to be the norm of interpretation this creed itself must be *apostolic*. Of course, there were still fluctuations as regards the precise and definitive text,⁶⁴ but in the main outline the different affirmations were already contained in the symbols of the middle of the second century, and, above all, the principle of the norm of an apostolic rule of faith was admitted by that time. The attribution of each phrase to one of the twelve apostles is a legend. The truth in it is that behind the developed symbols stand the oldest ones, shorter formulae whose text was fixed in the apostolic age, traces of which are to be found in the New Testament.

The role of future creeds of the Church as worked out by the councils is quite different. Certainly they are also necessary in their intention to define an attitude towards the problems of their time and the heresies of the day. They are necessary, and in every age the Church must construct its creed. But these later confessions can never assume the value of a symbol attributed to the apostles; they can never become norms for all time. Here again we must repeat what we have said about the post-apostolic traditions of the Church. They have a very great importance in guiding our understanding of

⁶³ See O. Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, E.T., 1949.

⁶⁴ As I granted in my article in *Dieu vivant*, no. 23, p. 64, where I pointed out that the important thing is the *principle* of an apostolic creed. Moreover, in the book mentioned in the last note, I specified the relation between the already fixed formulae in the New Testament, and the later 'apostolic' symbol. J. Daniélou's objection, therefore, in 'Rép.', p. 115 f., is difficult to understand. Of course, the Apostles' Creed and even the old Roman symbol from which it grew did not exist in the apostolic age. But the principle of the creed and its essential elements are contained in the New Testament formulae. Fluctuations regarding certain of the clauses are of no more importance for our question than the discussions which went on for centuries about the admission of certain books into the canon, since the *principle* of the canon had long since been accepted.

the apostolic revelation, but they are not, like the so-called Apostles' Creed, a kind of last page to be added to the New Testament.

The conclusion, then, is that the difference established between apostolic and post-apostolic tradition is not arbitrary, but that it is *the difference which the Church itself made, at the decisive moment, in the second century, by formulating the principle of an apostolic canon and an apostolic summary of belief.*

All this finds its confirmation in the evolution of patristics. For a long time it has been noted that, apart from the letters of Ignatius, the writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers, who do not really belong to the apostolic age but to the beginning of the second century—the first epistle of Clement, the *Homily* assigned to Clement, the epistle of Barnabas, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the epistle of Polycarp—despite their theological interest, are at a considerable distance from New Testament thought, and to a considerable extent relapse into a moralism which ignores the notion of grace, and of the redemptive death of Christ, so central to apostolic theology.⁶⁵ It has also been noted that the Church Fathers who wrote after 150—Irenaeus and Tertullian—although chronologically more remote from the New Testament than the authors of the first half of the century, understood infinitely better the essence of the gospel. This seems paradoxical, but is explained perfectly by that most important act, the codification of the apostolic tradition in a canon, henceforward the superior norm of all tradition. The Fathers of the first half of the century wrote at a period when the writings of the New Testament already existed, but without being vested with canonical authority, and so set apart. Therefore they did not have any norm at their disposal, and, on the other hand, they were already too far distant from the apostolic age to be able to draw directly on the testimony of eye-witnesses. The encounters of Polycarp and Papias with apostolic persons could no longer guarantee a pure transmission of authentic traditions, as is proved by the extant fragments of their writings.

But after 150 contact with the apostolic age was re-established through the construction of the canon, which discarded all impure and deformed sources of information. Thus it is confirmed that, by subordinating all subsequent tradition to the canon, the Church once and for all saved its apostolic basis. It enabled its members to hear, thanks to this canon, continually afresh and throughout all the centuries to come the authentic word of the apostles, a privilege

⁶⁵ See T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, 1948.

which no oral tradition, passing through Polycarp or Papias, could have assured them.

We have said that scripture needs to be interpreted. The Church ought to feel itself responsible for this interpretation. It ought, when necessary, to declare its attitude to the exegesis of certain biblical passages put forward by its teachers or by independent scholars. But responsibility in this case consists, as we have seen, in pronouncing judgment in humble submission to the apostolic norm of the canon. Two implications follow: (1) The Church does not impose on future generations the obligation to take as a starting-point and as a norm of their interpretation of the same text the decision that it feels bound to take, but it remains conscious of the superiority of scripture as the immediate testimony of the divine revelation to the interpretation which it feels compelled to give, and which can only be a derivative testimony, in which the human element plays a larger part. (2) The Church decides by confronting the biblical text itself, trusting in the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, and having recourse to the tradition only as a secondary source and as a guide which can give us light if we do not set it above the word of the apostles, and are ready, if need be, to break away from it.

Do we not continually experience afresh a kind of liberation when, after having read a number of commentaries, however good, we read the biblical Word itself, forcing ourselves to forget the very things we have read in the commentaries, with the healthy *naïveté* of the catechumen seeking to hear the apostles speak of what they have seen and heard? Certainly the Bible needs to be interpreted. For its writers were men of their time, and therefore it contains inevitable imperfections inherent in any human word which tries to translate the divine Word. But is it not lack of faith to take our stand on the human character of the revelation transmitted by the apostles and on our own human weakness as readers exposed to all kinds of mistakes, in order to claim that we are no longer capable of hearing their testimony without passing through a long chain of intermediaries in which the human element, moreover, plays a greater part because they are not eye-witnesses like the apostles? Certainly we ought to undertake the reading of the biblical Word with the philological knowledge that we have acquired, and we ought to give certain directives to the common man to whom it is not available. But in order that the exegete, like the common man, should become capable of hearing, in this twentieth century, the very voice of the apostles, and thereby the *Kyrios* himself, they must be certain (and

must communicate this certainty to others) that the eye-witnesses, while expressing themselves in the language of their time, are still able to speak to us *directly*, when we are ready to confront their word with this faith in the Holy Spirit who is able to dispense with intermediaries.

Conclusion

Is the gulf which separates Catholic doctrine and Protestant doctrine on the relation between scripture and tradition unbridgeable? Perhaps so, as regards the theory. In practice the two attitudes have come curiously near to one another. We have said that Protestants have always recognized a tradition as guide—the decisions of the first ecumenical councils and the writings of the Reformers. But for some time now Protestant theology has been turning, more than in the past, to the study of patristics. Thus we are beginning to understand on the Protestant side what an immense treasure there is in the work of the Fathers, and we have begun to break away from that strange conception of Church history and Christian thought which supposed that between the second and the sixteenth centuries there was, with the exception of certain sects, a complete eclipse of the gospel.

On the other side, we are witnessing today a Catholic interest in the reading and study of the Bible greater, perhaps, than at any previous period. The work of Père Lagrange, to name only one; the encyclical *Divino afflante spiritu*; the extraordinary energy of the Biblical Institute in Rome and of the Biblical School of the Dominicans in Jerusalem; the publication of the excellent translation in the *Sainte Bible*, known as the Jerusalem Bible; do these not prove that the most valuable Catholic contributions to the understanding of the Bible are due, despite the theory of tradition, to a direct, immediate contact with the biblical text in the original? And the 'Catholic variations' in the appreciation of certain exegetical problems—for instance, the famous *comma Johannis* (I John 5.7)—are these revisions of previous judgments not a proof that on many occasions the Catholic Church has been able to set scripture above its tradition?

In mentioning these *rapprochements* that can be noted on the practical level, we do not seek to minimize the great divergence of doctrine which nevertheless exists. But we think that they ought to incite us to discuss the old theoretical problem of 'scripture and

tradition' without any polemical intention, and with an absolute frankness and calmness which can do nothing but good in furthering interchange of views among the Christian communions.

The great divergence between Protestants and Catholics concerns especially the question whether the unique testimony of the apostles can be actualized by the written word. Our answer has been, Yes. It is scripture which actualizes this testimony, as it is the sacraments which actualize the redemptive work of Christ. *The divine Word and the sacraments: these are the two great contemporary miracles in our midst, in the Church!*

And why is scripture not a dead letter, but a source of life in which Christ is present? Because, on the one hand, the *Kyrios* speaks directly through it, as we saw; and, on the other, the actualization of the revelation, in spite of our human imperfection and the possibility of errors in interpretation, is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, for we live already in the new age, which is the age of the Spirit. The *Kyrios* is present in scripture, and the Holy Spirit is present in the reader who has faith.

As an illustration of what I have wished to bring out in this work, I may conclude by referring to the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24.13 f., three verses of which stand at the beginning of this study. While the disciples are questioning together and their unknown companion is speaking to them of Moses, all the prophets, and all the scriptures (verse 27), suddenly their eyes are opened and they know the Christ seated before them.

The Kingship of Christ

and the

Church in the New Testament

Translated from *Königsherrschaft Christi
und Kirche im Neuen Testament*, 3rd
edition, 1950, Zollikon-Zürich

Foreword

THE PRESENT STUDY is the result of the reshaping and expansion of a lecture which I gave on the occasion of the first meeting of students of all the evangelical theological faculties in German and French Switzerland, which was held in Gwatt near Thun on April 27th, 1940.

Several fundamental studies on the Church in the New Testament and its relation to the Kingdom of God have appeared in recent years. My purpose in this essay is to develop and deepen the insights already achieved, by introducing a third New Testament concept, the *Regnum Christi*, which, while differing from these other two concepts, is nevertheless closely bound up with them. My treatment of the question of the relations between the *Regnum Christi* and the Church is also intended to illuminate, as far as its ultimate New Testament roots are concerned, the much-discussed problem of Church and State which is anchored in the very nature of Christianity.

In accordance with the original framework of the lecture I have proceeded by way of synthesis and have attempted to work out the common elements in the New Testament statements on our theme, but the method is not intended to efface the differences established by analysis. The tacit assumption behind the enquiry is that the various New Testament writings deal with the same questions from different points of view, just as, inversely, the tacit assumption on which analytical studies of problems of New Testament theology are based is that the writings of the New Testament are all united by a common theme.

The Kingship of Christ and the Church in the New Testament

(1) *The Problem*

In the New Testament we find the classical expression of the belief in the kingship exercised by Christ in the present era in all those passages which refer to Christ 'sitting on the right hand of God' and to the 'subjection of all his enemies',¹ following the prototype of Psalm 110, which is taken as referring to the kingship of Christ. The supreme expression of the belief is to be found, however, at the close of that creed-like early Christian psalm, probably first composed in Aramaic² which appears in Philippians 2.6 f.: '... wherefore God also highly exalted him and gave him a name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'.

The fact that from a particular moment in time God conferred on Jesus Christ the title 'Lord' (Hebrew: *Adonai*; Greek: *Kyrios*), which belongs to him alone (Phil. 2.10), means that Christ rules as King not only over us men but over the invisible powers in heaven, on earth and under the earth. The 'enemies' to whose subjection Psalm 110 refers are related to the invisible hostile powers.

One of the oldest Christian creeds consists of the three words: *Kyrios Jesus Christos*: Jesus Christ is Lord. For the first Christians this meant that Christ is not merely the true ruler of men, as the Roman emperor claimed to be, but ruler of the whole visible and invisible creation. It is essential to remember this to grasp the whole range of meaning contained in this first early Christian creed. In the epistle to the Romans what St. Paul calls 'confessing with the

¹ Rom. 8.34; 1 Cor. 15.25; Col. 3.1; Eph. 1.20; Heb. 1.3; 8.1; 10.13; 1 Peter 3.22; Acts 2.34; 5.31; 7.55; Rev. 3.21; Matt. 22.44; 26.64; Mark 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Luke 20.42; 22.69; see also 1 Clem. 36.5; Barn. 12.10.
² E. Lohmeyer, 'Kyrios Jesus' in *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl.*, 1927-8, no. 4, and J. Héring, 'Kyrios Anthropos', in *R.H.P.R.*, 1936, p. 196 f.

mouth' also consists in a confession that Jesus is the *Kyrios* (10.9). Wherever this short creed is elaborated in greater detail the subjection of the invisible powers to Christ is always mentioned explicitly, as in the passage from the epistle to the Philippians already quoted.

There is evidence that in an early form of the later Roman Apostles' Creed, with which we are familiar, the subjection of the powers and principalities to Christ was specifically referred to after the 'sitting on the right hand of God'. Apart from Philippians 2.10 we may mention I Peter 3.22, where in a context which is clearly confessional it is stated: '... who has gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him'. To this may be added I Timothy 3.16: 'seen by angels'. Outside the New Testament these 'powers', the *ἐπουράνια*, the *ἐπίγεια* and the *ὑποχθόνια*, are expressly mentioned in the second century in the epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians (9.1), which contains a version of the creed corresponding to some extent *verbatim* to the second article of the later Apostles' Creed, and in the epistle of Polycarp (2.1), whilst in the writings of Justin Martyr³ and Irenaeus⁴ we still find clear indications that the confession of belief in Christ the 'Lord' embraces his kingship over all the powers of the visible and invisible creation. It should also be noted that at the close of St. Matthew's Gospel the risen Lord introduces the command to baptize all nations, which also gave rise to confessional formulae, with the words: 'all power (*πᾶσα ἐξουσία*) has been given to me in heaven and on earth'.

This belief in the present rule of Christ over all things, which was the strong centre of the whole faith of the early Christians, accords with the fact that in the New Testament Christ also appears as the mediator of the original divine work of creation: '... by him (Christ) were all things created that are in heaven and that are in

³ *Apol.* I, 42, *ἐβασίλευσεν* and especially *Dial. with Trypho*, 85, *κύριος τῶν δυνάμεων*. The context appears to suggest that the use of the creed in exorcizing demons helped to establish the reference to Christ's dominion over the 'powers'.

⁴ *Adv. Haer.*, I.10. It is typical of Irenaeus that he places this rule over the powers exclusively in the period following the *parousia*, whereas the old creed which he uses here probably implies the present dominion of Christ. This is related to the fact that Irenaeus does not take the present *Regnum Christi* into account at all. The strictly linear conception of time which Irenaeus developed in his struggle against Gnosticism, the almost exaggeratedly uninterrupted straight line leading from the creation to the last things means that the whole process hastens towards the final eschatological fulfilment with such speed that there is no time for an intervening *Regnum Christi*. Cf. below, p. 137.

earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him: and he is before all things and in him all things consist' (Col. 1.16). The same thought is expressed in I Corinthians 8.6 and in the prologue to St. John's Gospel: 'all things were made by him', and in the epistle to the Hebrews: 'by whom also he made the worlds' (1.2 f.).

It is therefore natural that at the end of time, when God will create a 'new heaven and a new earth', Christ will also be the mediator of that new creation. The coming of the final catastrophe which the early Christians were awaiting, when Christ will appear again, will take place by a sovereign act of God corresponding exactly to the creative act 'in the beginning'; with a command (I Thess. 4.16) that can only be compared with that first command: 'Let there be light'. Christ was the mediator of creation 'in the beginning'; Christ is to be the mediator of the new creation at the end of time.

The original Christian confession of belief in Christ the 'Lord', according to which Christ now rules over the whole creation, visible and invisible, in heaven, on earth and under the earth has to be understood in this context. We shall have to examine to what period of time this effective exercise of the *Regnum Christi* refers, and in what way the subject powers are governed in this space of time.

How does the Church fit into this whole complex of problems in the New Testament? In what relationship does the Church of Christ stand to this *Regnum Christi* which we still have to define more closely? That there must be a remarkably close connection between them is due to the very nature of the two concepts, and the New Testament does, in fact, reveal an intimate connection between them, inasmuch as the Church of Christ is also mentioned in some of the key-passages concerning the *Regnum Christi*. In Colossians 1.14 f. Christ appears not merely as the creative mediator of all 'visible and invisible things' but also as the one who effects the 'reconciliation' with God 'of all things, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven', and in this wide cosmic setting we read in verse 17 that Christ is also the head of the body, the Church. In the epistle to the Ephesians the solidarity between Church and creation is expressed even more clearly: 'he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the Church' (1.22). And according to Hebrews 1.14 even the angels are

sent out to serve under Christ 'for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation'.

From these passages it is quite clear that the *Regnum Christi* and the Church of Christ are essentially correlated in the New Testament, and that the question of the relationship between them which we are raising in the present essay is not one that has to be imported into the New Testament. We are, in fact, concerned with a particular aspect of the more comprehensive problem of the relationship between redemption and creation. The creation is discussed not only on the first page of the Old Testament but throughout the Bible, right up to the very last page of the New Testament.

The fact that he is created in the image of God raises man, whom God created in the beginning, above all other creatures; but it also means that the whole creation has been drawn into the drama occasioned by man's sin. The earth is cursed for the sake of Adam. This is stated not only in the book of Genesis but also in the epistle to the Romans (8.20). But for the same reason the redemption of man by Christ's death on the cross also affects the whole creation. According to the Synoptic Gospels the earth grew dark when Christ's sufferings reached their climax; and according to the Gospel of Matthew (27.51) the earth shook at the moment of his death, in which all things are reconciled to God through the blood of his cross (Col. 1.20). In this sense we may speak of the spell cast on Good Friday on the evidence of the New Testament itself.

In particular, however, creation also shares in the present hope, in the waiting and 'groaning' of man for perfection (Rom. 8.21 f.), precisely because of what took place on the cross in the first place for man, but also for creation. This groaning of the whole creation is an intimation of the new creation in which there will be no more death and decay.⁵ The whole of nature is still waiting but one can also say, has been waiting already, since the all-important event has already taken place.

The New Testament relationship between the kingship of Christ and the Church of Christ is grounded in the solidarity which binds the whole creation to man. One is, therefore, not surprised that at the end of St. Matthew's Gospel (28.18) the risen Christ at the very time when he issues the summons to establish the Church which is implicit in the command to baptize all nations, which we have already mentioned, also reminds his disciples of the power over the whole

⁵ Papias sketches a drastic picture of renewed and liberated nature. See Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, V, 33.3 f.

creation which has been given to him: 'All power is given to me in heaven and on earth'.

As *Kyrios* (*Adonai*) Christ is, in the first place, Lord of creation; as βασιλεύς, King of the Jews,⁶ King of Israel,⁷ he is above all Lord of the Church. But the title of *Kyrios* also refers to his dominion over Israel and over the Church, wherever there is resistance to the Roman emperor's claim to be *Kyrios*. And, inversely, Christ's kingship covers his rule over creation when he is described as 'the King of kings and Lord of lords' in I Timothy 6.15, and in the reference to his kingship in I Corinthians 15.24 and especially in Matthew's Gospel which emphasizes Christ's kingship over Israel from the very first chapter onwards,⁸ and ends with an unsurpassably emphatic reference to his power over heaven and earth. Here, too, then, we have the same close connection between the kingship of Christ and the Church.

(2) *The Time of the Regnum Christi and the Time of the Church of Christ*

We are assuming that the *Regnum Christi* and the Church of Christ, these two closely related but not identical factors, both belong to the same limited period of time. This is what differentiates them from the Kingdom of God. Therefore, however close their relationship, the *Regnum Christi* and the Kingdom of God are no more interchangeable concepts than the Church and the Kingdom of God.

It is quite true that the *Regnum Christi*, the Church and the Kingdom of God all belong to the end of time, but the *Regnum Christi* and the Church of Christ coincide with a chronologically limited phase of this time, namely, the phase which has already begun and in which we are living, the beginning of which is behind and the end of which is before us, whereas the Kingdom of God is a purely future quantity.⁹

The endless discussion as to whether the Kingdom of God is a

⁶ Matt. 2.2; 27.11, 29, 37; Mark 15.2, 9, 12, 18, 26; Luke 23.3, 37; John 18.33, 37, 39; 19.3, 14, 19, 21.

⁷ Matt. 27.42; Mark 15.32; John 1.49; 12.13.

⁸ J. Wilkens rightly considers this motif the key to an understanding of St. Matthew's Gospel in his *Der König Israels. Eine Einführung in das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 1934 (*Die urchristliche Botschaft*, edited by O. Schmitz).

⁹ There is far-reaching agreement on this point today. See Schmidt, article βασιλεία, in G. Kittel's *T.W.N.T.*, i, p. 562 f.

present or future quantity in the New Testament¹⁰ might have taken a different turn if a clear-cut chronological distinction had been made between the βασιλεία τοῦ υιοῦ, that is to say, the *Regnum Christi*, and the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, that is to say, the Kingdom of God. St. Paul makes the clearest possible chronological distinction between them. In I Corinthians 15.23 f. the Son to whom 'the Father has subjected everything' will subject himself to the Father only after his second coming and after all the events connected with it, and will then surrender all authority to God the Father. This will happen when he 'shall have destroyed all rule and authority and power'. Only then will come the time of the new creation, the time of the Kingdom of God the Father. 'For the son must reign as king' we read in the same passage, in free imitation of the psalm: 'until he has put all enemies under his feet'. But this kingship is not to begin sometime in the millennium, in which it will continue after Christ's second coming,¹¹ but has begun already. We are already in a βασιλεία, namely, the *Regnum Christi*. In so far as we share his dominion, we already form this βασιλεία on the basis of redemption (Rev. 1.6).

In the epistle to the Colossians (1.13), too, the beginning of the Son's kingship, which is clearly distinguished from the Kingdom of God, lies in the past: '(God) delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear son'. Thus Christ already exercises his authority over all the subject powers. For the βασιλεία of the Son the Christian can already thank God (Col. 1.12 f.); but for the coming of the Kingdom of God he must still pray: 'Thy Kingdom come'. The original Christian creed: *Kyrios Jesus Christos* simply means: The *Regnum Christi* is here, 'Jesus Christ reigns as King, all things are subject to him'. One can see why Christians were willing to die for this faith. In Thessalonica (Acts 17.7) they were already accused of 'saying that there is another king, one Jesus'. And it is even easier to see how 'serious' it was for them (to use the words of the heathen imperial official from Smyrna in the year 155) to say *Kaisar Kyrios* (*Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 8.2). If there was another *Kyrios* besides the one to whom God had given this name which is above all other names, then the *Regnum Christi* would simply not yet exist at all, Christ

¹⁰ As far as the Gospels are concerned a good account is given by W. G. Kümmel, 'Die Eschatologie der Evangelien', *Theol. Blätter*, 1936, p. 225-41. Cf. G. Gloege, *Reich Gottes und Kirche im N.T.* (N.T. Forsch., edited by O. Schmitz), 1929.

¹¹ See below, p. 111 f.

would not be reigning, and we should be back at the stage of mere waiting. The Christian waits for the Kingdom of God, but he waits for it because he knows that the *Regnum Christi* has already begun.

Christ laid the foundation of his kingship in his death and resurrection, through which he secured the victory over the powers that are henceforth subject to him. Even though the final destruction of the enemies is reserved for a future phase, of which we shall speak later on,¹² in which the 'last enemy', death, will be destroyed along with the other hostile powers (I Cor. 15.24, 26), the decisive defeat of death has already been accomplished in the death and resurrection of Christ (II Tim. 1.10), and the apostle can write: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' (I Cor. 15.55). It is the risen Lord who tells the disciples that all power has been given to him in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28.18). Christ's death and resurrection provide the basis for the present realization of the *Regnum Christi*.

The effective beginning and the appropriation of his kingly power took place in the ascension, when Christ set himself at the right hand of God. In the New Testament what the much-quoted Psalm 110 says in the Jewish messianic interpretation of the messianic king of the future: 'Sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool', is transferred to the present phase which has already begun: '(Christ) is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him' (I Pet. 3.22). That Christ has already sat down at the right hand of God is a recurring *leitmotiv* in the New Testament.¹³ According to the passage in I Peter just quoted, the subjection of the 'enemies' prophesied in Psalm 110 has already taken place. This does not conflict with Hebrews 10.13 and I Corinthians 15.25, where it is pointed out that their destruction will only be consummated in the future, in the last stage of the *Regnum Christi*.

For just as the *Regnum Christi* has a beginning, so too it has an end. Because the end is in the future it cannot be assigned a historical date like the beginning. But the New Testament does at least indicate the future event which will initiate the final phase of the *Regnum Christi*: the second coming of Christ. It began with the ascension of Christ; it will end with his second coming. Therefore, in the words of the 'two men in white apparel' the author of the Acts of the

¹² See below, p. 112 f.

¹³ See above, p. 105, n. 1.

Apostles (I.11) also stresses the external correspondence between these two facts which constitute the framework of the *Regnum Christi*: 'this Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner (that is, on the clouds) as you saw him go into heaven'.

It should be noted very carefully, however, that according to the Revelation of John and I Corinthians 15.23 f. the second coming of Christ and the eschatological events associated with it have still to be regarded as the final act of the *Regnum Christi*. For the Son will 'deliver up the kingdom to God' only when the final struggle has been successfully fought, after Christ's second coming. Thus the final act of the *Regnum Christi* projects into the beginnings of the coming age, the αἰὼν μέλλων, the new creation; it belongs not only to the present but also to the eschatological future. In that final act what has already happened and what is still happening in the present phase of the *Regnum Christi* will be repeated in a final and concentrated form: the victory over Satan and the 'powers', their bondage and the release for final destruction.

That part of the *Regnum Christi* projects into the future age is evident from the whole of the Revelation of John and also from the concept of the millennium (20.4 f.) which represents the Church as it will be in that final act,¹⁴ and which is usually misleadingly described as an *interregnum*. The millennium and the apocalyptic events which precede it represent the part of the *Regnum Christi* which began with the ascension and which overlaps into the future age.¹⁵ The term *interregnum* would be better applied to the whole of the *Regnum Christi*, the whole period between the conclusion of the work achieved by the historical Christ and the conclusion of the work achieved by Christ at his second coming. The millennium must, therefore, not be identified with the whole *Regnum Christi* or

¹⁴ As expounded correctly by Karl Ludwig Schmidt in 'Le problème du christianisme primitif', *Quatre conférences sur la forme et la pensée du Nouveau Testament*, 1938, p. 84, n. 4. We would, however, wish more emphasis to be placed on the connection of this final act with the *Regnum Christi* which began with the ascension.

¹⁵ J. Héring, *Le Royaume de Dieu et sa venue, Objet de l'espérance de Jésus et de St. Paul*, 1937, p. 176, rightly stresses the contemporaneity of the messianic kingdom in St. Paul's thought, as against Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, E.T., 1931. But he does not allow its due importance to the final phase of this kingdom, which Paul also conceives as projecting into the coming age and which both crowns and recapitulates the messianic kingdom, when he merely mentions in a subordinate clause, 'that the messianic kingdom projects slightly into the time fixed by the *parousia*'.

with the present Church.¹⁶ The *Regnum Christi* is the more comprehensive concept, for this reign began almost two thousand years ago and will continue for an indefinite time in this age, whereas the millennium belongs to the final act of the *Regnum Christi* initiated by the *parousia*, in which the Church will play a specially important part.

In chronological terms, the theme of the whole drama described in the Revelation of John as far as and including chapter 20 is not the Kingdom of God but the *Regnum Christi*, or rather the final act of this reign of Christ.¹⁷ At the very beginning we hear that Christ has power over death and Hades (1.18), that he is the ruler of the kings of the earth and, later, that he rules all nations with a rod of iron (12.5; 19.15), that his name is 'King of kings' and 'Lord of lords' (19.16).

Thus the faithful Christian is subject at present to a rule which, though it still belongs entirely to the present age, will continue for a while within the future age of which the apocalypticist speaks. Nevertheless, the whole *Regnum Christi* forms a unity, as is already evident from the fact that the phase which precedes the *parousia* merely represents a kind of recapitulation of the phase which is to follow it.¹⁸ This is the reason for the curious tension between present and future which runs right through the New Testament and which is typical of the Christian situation. The *Regnum Christi* is the meeting-ground of the two great ages of the universe into which the New Testament, along with late Judaism, divides the whole course of time. The rule of Christ occupies both the final period of the present age and the beginnings of the future. Although it still belongs entirely to this age, our present age is already a final period since a reign has already begun which will still exist in the *parousia* and the events associated with it: the *Regnum Christi*.

The eschatological problem of the New Testament is contained in this tension. Any attempt to remove the tension would mean

¹⁶ This latter assumption, maintained by the Donatist Tyconius and made famous by Augustine, is in contradiction to the whole of the New Testament.

¹⁷ The literary and historical problem of the sources of the materials used in the Revelation is not under discussion here and may be passed over.

¹⁸ For this reason, that is, because the two phases of the *Regnum Christi* form a unity, every generation which belongs to the phase of the *Regnum* preceding the *parousia* may see in contemporary events the signs of the end described in the Revelation. But no generation must assert that such events are the final sign from which the actual date of the end can be worked out. For we do not know how long this first phase is to last. The New Testament lays special emphasis on the fact that we do not know the date of the *parousia*.

annulling the situation created by Christ. It derives in the last resort from the fact that judgment has already been passed within the present age in the death and resurrection of Christ, and that it must be made once again after the present age has disappeared.¹⁹ This is why the subjection of the hostile powers precedes the ascension in I Peter 3.22 whereas, according to the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, the Christ who sits at the right hand of God still waits for it (10.13). That is also the reason for the characteristic relationship between the 'subjection' and 'destruction' of the powers. The verb *καταργέω*, which the New Testament is fond of using in this context, has both meanings: 'subject' and 'destroy'. It is used in II Timothy 1.10, which refers to the victory over death which Christ has already achieved on the cross, and also in I Corinthians 15.26 where the reference is to the victory over death which will only be attained after Christ's second coming (see also Rev. 20.14). On both occasions the victory is final but, whereas the first time death merely has the 'power taken from it', to quote Luther's faithful translation of the verb in II Timothy 1.10, the second time it is destroyed.²⁰ Between the two victories the 'powers' are tied to the power of Christ, but the line to which they are attached varies in slackness from time to time.

Is this a case of the cyclic, that is, the Greek concept of time, according to which everything recurs in an eternal revolution, and redemption consists in a release from the compulsion of time and is therefore outside time? To accept that view would mean mistaking the very essence of New Testament eschatology, which presupposes a linear concept of time,²¹ and in which redemption takes place

¹⁹ Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, E.T., 1931, p. 64, recognizes that Paul represents the future redemption 'as having already begun to come into operation', but he still thinks it remarkable (p. 66) that a struggle with the invisible powers will take place in the coming age. The reason why he evidently perceives a contradiction in Paul's thought which he cannot explain is that the character of the present *Regnum Christi* is not defined in its relationship to the future age.

²⁰ Barth, *Rechtfertigung und Recht* (*Theol. Studien*, no. 1), 1938, p. 16, rightly draws attention to the double meaning of *καταργεῖν*, but translates the verb in I Cor. 15.24 as 'subject', whereas the meaning here is 'destroy', no less certainly than two verses later where it is a question of death (cf. Delling in *T.W.N.T.*). The verb also has the sense of 'destroy' in II Thess. 2.8, where it is a question of the events which will take place in connection with the *parousia*.

²¹ Cf. on the problem of 'time and eschatology', F. Holmström, *Das eschatologische Denken der Gegenwart*, 1936 (cf. my review in *R.H.P.R.*, 1938, p. 347 f.). Cf. also Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik. Die Lehre von Gott*, 1st Halbband, 1940, p. 685 f.

within the process of time controlled by God. Admittedly, God is the Lord of time and it was possible for the decisive victory over Satan and the 'powers' to be perfectly achieved on the cross; yet it was still possible for the eschatological unfolding of the drama of redemption (ushered in by this victory) to be reserved for a later time. It must not be inferred from the fact that Christ's death is the central, all-inclusive event in the New Testament that there is no process of salvation in time. According to the New Testament the death of Christ includes everything before and after, both the Old Testament from the creation onwards and the New Testament with its eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God the Father. But this does not involve a denial of the temporal, chronological nature of world history as a linear and unrepeatable process; far from denying the linear nature of history it is asserted more fully in the New Testament than ever before, in a reaction to Greek Gnosticism.

All the characteristic and often misinterpreted 'anticipations' of the future in the New Testament arise from the fact that Christ's death includes everything that precedes and follows it, though the drama of salvation is a forward-striving process developing in time. Thus, for example, in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus sees Satan cast down from heaven even before his death (Luke 10.17). When Jesus, who came to achieve the victory by his death, dwelt on earth such an anticipation was natural,²² as was his proclamation that the Kingdom of God had already come (Matt. 12.28; Luke 11.20).²³ This is why the linguistic distinction between the βασιλεία of the Father and that of the Son is not sustained consistently in New Testament

²² The formula of Christ as the αὐτοβασιλεία which was created by Origen (Migne, P. G., Series I, T. XIII) refers to this. Cf. P. Feine, *Theologie des N.T.*, 1910, p. 100; G. Kittel, *Die Probleme des palästinischen Spätjudentums und das Urchristentum*, 1926, p. 130 f.; K. L. Schmidt, article βασιλεία in Kittel's *T.W.N.T.*, i, p. 591.

²³ In Luke 10.17 Jesus communicates the vision of the fallen Satan to the returning Seventy, who have reported to him with joy that the demons were subject to them through his name. The words 'through your name' are all-important for the Synoptic testimony. The driving out of the demons could not be connected in itself with the vision of the fallen Satan. Jesus himself recognizes that even Jews cast out demons (Matt. 12.27). He is able to infer that the Kingdom of God exists already from the fact that he, the Son of Man returning on the clouds, casts them out and has them cast out in his name.

usage.²⁴ This does not alter the fact that the chronological differentiation between them is unequivocally implicit in the New Testament. In substance the *Regnum Christi* is no more separate from the Kingdom of God the Father than the Son is separate from the Father, but from the point of view of time it represents a power of its own; it began with the ascension, and will end in the opening phase of the future age.

The time of the Church can be defined in just the same way. It, too, has a beginning and an end, and its duration coincides with the same phase of the end of time as that of the *Regnum Christi*. It was initiated by the same central fact of the death of Christ. For the Church of Christ the cross is also the *terminus a quo*. Only the cross makes the existence of the Church possible, though a church already existed in the Old Testament in the form of God's chosen people and then as the 'remnant' of Israel, which turns back and which, according to the prophets, God has chosen to save.²⁵ The history of man's salvation, which Christians now interpret retrospectively as preceding the Church of Christ, began in Old Testament times.

Christian understanding of this fact is born in the light of the cross. But this insight into what has gone before does not necessarily obliterate the chronological frontiers of the Church of Christ.²⁶ The fact remains that the Church which was prepared for in the Old Testament is only realized as the Church of Christ in that final phase of time ushered in by the death of Christ.

According to the Acts of the Apostles the only chronological difference between the beginning of the *Regnum Christi* and that of the Church is that the *Regnum Christi* was born at the ascension and the Church at Pentecost.

Pentecost is the beginning of the Church, the opening stage of the realization of the people of God in the end of time. The Spirit overcomes the separation of nations divided by language. But the Spirit is the element of the future Kingdom of God. The miracle of

²⁴ See K. L. Schmidt, article βασιλεία in G. Kittel's *T.W.N.T.*, i, p. 581 f., though he is forced to conclude, *ib.*, p. 582, 'that one must not speak of the βασιλεία of Christ without that of God'. In fact, it is impossible to separate them as far as their content is concerned, though chronologically it is absolutely essential to differentiate them.

²⁵ See Schmidt, article βασιλεία in *T.W.N.T.*, i, p. 502 f.; *id.*, 'Die Kirche des Urchristentums' (*Festgabe f. A. Deissmann*), 1927.

²⁶ On the relation between the Church of Christ and the Old Testament see below, p. 128-131.

Pentecost is that this future element which is to provide the material of the new creation takes hold already of a part of the old sin-corrupted creation in the present age, without being able to transform its outer framework. The miracle occurs from now on in the Church. That which took place at the ascension for the whole creation on the basis of death and resurrection, the subjection to Christ in the end-time, here takes place for the people of God, on whom the highest mission in creation devolves: the realization in the end-time of a fellowship in Christ ordained by the Spirit of God—both on the way to the Kingdom of God.

Peter's speech at Pentecost (Acts 2.14 f.), which is based on the prophecy of Joel, clearly refers to the fact that now that the Spirit has laid hold of the community, the 'last times' are being made manifest (ἐν ἔσχαταις ἡμέραις, verse 17). When he calls the Spirit that already exists in the present the 'first-fruits' (ἀπαρχή, Rom. 8.23) and 'earnest' (ἀρραβών, II Cor. 1.22), St. Paul is recalling that the Spirit represents part of the future that is already present. Seeing that the Church of Christ was founded by the Spirit at Pentecost as the Church of the end-time, it is significant that in the later creed Spirit, Church and expectation of the future are combined in the third article.

The sacrament of Baptism, by which the believer becomes a member of the Church, leads to a sharing in the Spirit: 'By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body' (I Cor. 12.13). On the other hand, in Romans 6.3 Paul emphasizes that Baptism means being taken up into the death and resurrection of Christ, which are the precondition of the Church's existence. Since the birthday of the Church coincides with the coming of the Spirit, it not only introduces the end-time, but presupposes the death of Christ in time. For, according to the Gospel of John, the Spirit can only appear after this event and after Christ has been 'glorified' (John 7.39). And according to the farewell discourses in this Gospel the promise of the Spirit can only be fulfilled as a sequel to Christ's death, so that the Church of Christ cannot arise before that event has taken place.

If we proceed from the other crucial New Testament definition of the Church we shall reach the same conclusion. According to Ephesians 2.20, the Church is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets'.²⁷ Paul recognized that as much as did the early Church itself. According to him the apostolate supplements

²⁷ In view of 3.5 and 4.11 it can hardly be disputed that New Testament prophets are meant in this passage.

the Spirit as a constitutive element of the Church.²⁸ But, in the New Testament, being an apostle means having witnessed the resurrection of Christ, having seen the risen Lord, which is another way of saying that the Church can only be translated into reality after the death and resurrection of Christ.

So far as this is true, the disciples can only be said to have constituted the foundation of the Church in Jesus's own lifetime. First of all, they had to become apostles, witnesses of Christ's resurrection. And it is significant that baptism, the sacrament of reception into the Church, was first instituted by Christ after his resurrection.

Nevertheless, it was the earthly Jesus who laid the foundations of the Church before his death. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the words about the Church which Jesus spoke to Peter in Matthew 16.18 or to regard them as a later insertion of the early Church. But it should be noted that the Greek rendering of Jesus's words uses the future tense: οἰκοδομήσω, 'I *will* build my Church'. The context shows that the evangelist used the future tense to underline the necessity of Christ's death as the precondition of the Church's existence. It can hardly be a coincidence that in the very passage in Matthew in which he predicts the coming of the Church, he also foretells his passion for the first time and that the evangelist deliberately underlines the connection between the two prophecies: 'from that time forth', ἀπὸ τότε, that is, after Christ had referred to the future Church, 'he began to show to his disciples how that he must suffer many things . . . and be killed, and be raised again the third day'.

It is not, however, merely a common point of departure which the Church shares with the *Regnum Christi*. It also has the same duration, and the parallel is so close that, like the kingship of Christ, the Church also fills the whole final period of the present age which

²⁸ In Karl Holl's suggestive article 'Der Kirchenbegriff des Paulus in seinem Verhältnis zu dem der Urgemeinde' (*Ges. Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, ii, 1928, p. 44 f.) the contrast between the foundation of the Church on the apostolate (the concept of the Church held by the Church in Jerusalem) and the foundation of the Church on the Spirit (Paul's concept of the Church) is exaggerated. (The same applies to Maurice Goguel, 'Le problème de l'Église dans le christianisme primitif', in *R.H.P.R.*, 1938, p. 293 f.). In fact, the Church in Jerusalem did know that the Church is founded on the Spirit (otherwise one would have to dispute the historical authenticity of the account of Pentecost with Maurice Goguel, 'La conception jérusalémite de l'Église et les faits de pneumatisme', *Mélanges Cumont*, 1936, p. 209 f.), and with St. Paul the foundation of the Church on the apostolate is more than a 'residue' (see Gal. 2.2: 'lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain').

has still to run its course and then projects into the opening phase of the future age, after which it will yield to the Kingdom of God. In the first place the Church of the New Testament is bound up with the present age, but it will appear as part of the coming age in that final act when Christ, returning on the clouds, will be encompassed by those who have for ever formed his Church on earth, when the apostles will sit on twelve thrones (Matt. 19.28), when they will reign with him (Rev. 5.10; 20.4; II Tim. 2.12), and when the 'saints', that is, all the members of the Church, will judge the 'angels' (I Cor. 6.2 f.). The millennium will be the Church of this final phase.

This will be the end of the Church as it will be the end of the *Regnum Christi*. And so the Church also shares in the tension between present and future. And here again it would be wrong to attempt to resolve the tension, for it is part of the very nature of the Church, as it is part of the nature of the *Regnum Christi*. The Church already belongs entirely to the end and still belongs entirely to the present.

This duality of the Church's existence is particularly apparent in the possession of the Spirit by which the Church is constituted. We have seen that the Spirit is an element of the future age, an element which will constitute the new creation of the Kingdom of God within and without. This constituent of the future Kingdom of God is already present in the Church, but only as an 'earnest' (II Cor. 2.22), as the 'firstfruits' (Rom. 8.23), because it is not yet able to break the outer framework of the present age in which the Church must live.

Thus despite its possession of the Spirit the Church still belongs to the present and has to wait for the time when God's Spirit will embrace all things, when God will be 'all in all' and when its own time will have run its course, after it has fulfilled a particularly important task as a 'co-ruler' in the final act. It is still waiting, but it may also be said that it has been waiting already, for its waiting is grounded in the Spirit which it already possesses (Rom. 8.23 f.).

Though it is already true that the 'gates of Hades shall not prevail against it' (Matt. 16.18), it must constantly fight against the power of hell, just as Christ in his kingdom still has to overcome the 'powers', though he has already vanquished them.

The Church and the *Regnum Christi* show the same tension between present and future time because they coincide in time.

Notable differences between them only appear when one examines their respective spheres and membership.

(3) *The Sphere of the Kingship of Christ and the Sphere of the Church*

The Greek word for dominion, βασιλεία, has three meanings. It means (1) the exercise of power, government; (2) the sphere, the territory or area governed; (3) the community of those who are governed. All three meanings are applicable to the βασιλεία of God, and the same is true of the βασιλεία of Christ except that the intermediate character of this βασιλεία modifies the usual meaning in each of the three cases. As far as the exercise of kingship is concerned, we have already seen how, in the Kingdom of Christ, it is marked by that peculiar provisional 'binding' of the 'powers', which still allows for their temporary release from bondage to Christ and the unleashing of their demonic violence.

It is in this light that the sphere and the membership of the *Regnum Christi* have to be defined. As regards the sphere of the kingdom, we have already noted that the kingship of Christ extends to the whole of creation: 'all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth'; 'that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil. 2.10); the reconciliation of all things to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Col. 1.14-20).

It is, therefore, not true that Christ now exercises his kingship only in heaven or the invisible world. Christ also rules on earth and over the state as well as the Church.²⁹

Admittedly, he does not rule over the states of this world directly, but only through the mediation of the 'powers and authorities' which he has subjected and which are provisionally attached to him. These invisible powers are active on earth. It is impossible to know how the various earthly spheres of influence are distributed among them since we do not know if the various terms: ἀρχαί, ἄρχοντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, ἐξουσίαι, δυνάμεις, θρόνοι, κυριότητες, ἄγγελοι were synonymous in New Testament times or whether, as appears likely, there were differences in meaning among them. But at any rate the earthly power of the state belongs to the sphere of these

²⁹ When the Johannine Christ declares 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18.36), he merely means that it is not an earthly state. That it is not *of* (ἐκ) this world does not mean that its influence does not extend to this world.

angel-powers. They were already behind the state authorities who brought Christ to the cross. They are the ἄρχοντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, who crucified the 'Lord of glory' in their ignorance of the 'hidden wisdom of God' (I Cor. 2.7-8). Herod and Pilate were merely their executive organs. If the invisible powers which stood behind them had known the divine plan of salvation they would not have crucified Christ, as the apostle writes in this passage of I Corinthians. For—this must have been the train of thought in Paul's mind—by this crucifixion they brought about their own defeat at the hands of Christ.

It is also evident from I Corinthians 6.3 that these invisible 'powers' are behind the earthly states. Paul justifies forbidding Christians to use secular courts for lawsuits between Christians on the ground that, at the end of time, in the final act of the *Regnum Christi*, the members of the Church will judge the 'angels'.

Apart from Titus 3.1 reference must be made, above all, to the main passage in which the state is discussed, Romans 13.1 f. Here Christians are commanded to be subject to the 'powers', ἐξουσίαι. The context shows that Paul is referring to the state. All the same, the expression ἐξουσίαι should be translated 'powers', to make it clear that the basis of the argument is the New Testament view that state authorities are the executive organs of the invisible powers.³⁰ Since these powers have been subjugated by Christ and are bound to him in this final phase of time, everyone is to be subject to them. For the duration of this period, the period of the *Regnum Christi*, they are 'ordained by God' and the fact that the New Testament associates the state so closely with these powers does not in any way imply, as has sometimes been thought, a disparagement of the state.³¹ On the other hand, the fact that the powers have already been overcome and yet have to be overcome once again, that, in particular, the ἐξουσίαι, ἄγγελοι, ἄρχοντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου which stand behind the state are able to free themselves temporarily from their attachment to Christ during the *Regnum Christi* and become demonic, just as Satan will be let loose from his prison in the final

³⁰ On the problem of the explanation of the ἐξουσίαι as angel-powers, see the appendix at the end of this essay.

³¹ Karl Barth's study, *Rechtfertigung und Recht* (*Theol. Studien*, no. 1), 1938, p. 14 f. shows how positively the state can be appraised on the assumption that the ἐξουσίαι of Rom. 13.1 refer to the angel-powers. It must not be forgotten, however, that however positively it is valued, even the lawful state is 'provisional and inconclusive' for the Christian in the New Testament (K. L. Schmidt, *Die Polis in Kirche und Welt. Eine lexikographische und exegetische Studie*, 1940).

act (Rev. 20.7), is one aspect of the whole duality of the *Regnum Christi*. For these things that are to be concentrated at the close of the *Regnum Christi* are, as we know, typical of the whole *Regnum Christi*, even in so far as it belongs to the present age.

As soon, however, as even a temporary release of the 'powers' behind the earthly states takes place, they reveal their demonic nature, violence is unleashed, and the authority of the state becomes a 'beast'. The self-deification of the state which bids the world set up and worship an 'image of the beast' (Rev. 13.14 f.) is the sure sign of this release from the ties which bind it to the *Regnum Christi*.

Attention has often been drawn to the contradictory attitude of Christians to the state as expressed in Revelation 13.1 f. on the one hand and in Romans 13.1 f. on the other. In the one case the state is 'ordained by God', 'servant of God'; in the other it is 'the beast'. In fact, there is no contradiction. The different approach is conditioned by the whole tension which characterizes the *Regnum Christi*, in which the subject powers and their executive organs, the earthly states, are subject to the rule of Christ and yet still able to obtain occasional release. The Christian attitude is perfectly clear: the most loyal subjection to the state as such, granting it everything that is its due and which it needs for its existence and security, but relentless opposition once it deifies itself. That an unleashing of demonic power is still possible does not alter the basic fact that Christ has already been given all power over the earth. There is no sphere of the divine creation in heaven and on earth which is excluded from the present rule of Christ. He also reigns over the 'groaning' creation of the earth that is waiting for final redemption.

The βασιλεία of Christ is everywhere, but it does not necessarily coincide spatially with creation, as will be the case with the βασιλεία of God. For not only are the 'powers' merely 'bound' throughout the visible and invisible world, but, although already conquered, the terrible power of the σάρξ and the 'last enemy', death, still persists on earth. The divine Spirit is already at work on earth, but it has not yet taken hold of earthly bodies; it will only transform them at the end (Rom. 8.11, 23; I Cor. 15.35 f.). So if it is only possible to describe the βασιλεία of Christ as a place, the place of the whole sphere of creation, with certain reservations, this is not to be taken as meaning that a part of creation, such as the earth, is excluded and that the present kingship of Christ is only in the invisible world, but rather that (1) the whole place is inhabited by the σάρξ and death which have been overcome by Christ but are still hostile; and (2)

every part of this place, whether in heaven or on earth, can release itself temporarily, as happens in the demonic unleashing of the power of the state. On the other hand, it is a mistake to believe that these unleashed powers can really escape from the rule of Christ. In fact, the line to which they are attached is merely lengthened sufficiently for them to cross the boundary. But the line remains.

In Colossians and Ephesians the image of the 'head' is used to describe the rule which Christ exercises over the visible and invisible creation. 'Christ is the head of all principality and power' (Col. 2.10). God has resolved to give history its fulfilment by summing up (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι) everything in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth (Eph. 1.10).

In both letters, however, Christ is also described as the head of the Church (Col. 1.17 and Eph. 1.22). From this point of view the Church might appear to be a mere section of the *Regnum Christi*, Christ being head of the Church because he is head of the whole creation, of which the Church itself is a part. At first sight this seems to be confirmed by the fact that the Church's sphere of influence is confined to the earthly world. In the New Testament that is part of the very nature of the Church. Its origin and its goal, Christ, the head, is beyond the earthly world, but the place where the rule of the Church is exercised is the visible world, and, within that world, an earthly community of human beings. The place in which the Church is set is much narrower than that of the *Regnum Christi*, and yet it would be wrong to infer that the Church therefore occupies a subordinate position within the all-embracing *Regnum Christi*. This concentration on one definite point of creation, the earthly world and, within this world, a human community, signifies rather that the Church is the heart and centre of the *Regnum Christi*. It is not merely a section but the only point from which the whole of the *Regnum Christi* can be seen, and whatever happens in the Church has a decisive influence throughout the *Regnum Christi*, just as the unique work of the earthly, incarnate Christ was decisive for the subjection of the whole creation.

This central position of the Church in the *Regnum Christi* is expressed in the New Testament in the description of the Church as the body of Christ. The Church is the earthly body of the risen Christ, who sits in heaven at the right hand of God in the fulness of his glory. The fact that Christ is at the same time described as head of the whole creation and, therefore, of the Church appears to occasion a certain incongruity inasmuch as for the Church he is now

both head and body, and the body 'grows up' into the head (Eph. 4.15-16).³² But this incongruity is, in fact, typical of the curious relationship between the Church and the *Regnum Christi*, and is related to the fact that, on the one hand, the Church is part of the whole sphere of the *Regnum* of which Christ is the head and, on the other hand, Christ himself is present in this limited part of the kingdom in quite a different way from elsewhere.

The term 'head' is an image of the whole Christ who rules over his kingdom, whereas the term 'body' is more than a mere image in the New Testament, since the bodily nature of the Church is conceived in a quite concrete sense,³³ not merely in Colossians and Ephesians but also in I Corinthians 12.27 and Galatians 4.19, where Paul writes that Christ must be 'formed' in the Galatian Churches (as in every Church). The early Christians may have seen this view prefigured in such words of Jesus as Matthew 10.40: 'He that receives you, receives me'. In the above-mentioned passage in Galatians (4.14) Paul writes that the Galatians had received him as Christ Jesus when they entered the Church and, inversely, in the Acts of the Apostles (9.4; 22.7; 26.14) on the road to Damascus the risen Lord says to Paul who is persecuting the Church: 'Why do you persecute me?'³⁴

In this connection, too, the Church exhibits a duality and a tension which is particularly acute at this point: the Church is, on the one

³² H. Schlier, 'Zum Begriff der Kirche im Epheserbrief', *Theol. Blätter*, 1927, col. 12 f., and *Christus und die Kirche im Epheserbrief*, 1930, has referred to Gnostic-mythological conceptions to explain the images; they do certainly afford parallels and contribute to the understanding of the language of Ephesians, but they do not illuminate the theological meaning of the concept of the Church as the body of Christ which is presupposed in this epistle. The same applies to Traugott Schmidt, *Der Leib Christi, eine Untersuchung zum urchristlichen Gemeindegedanken*, 1919, who quotes Stoic descriptions of the body as an organism; and also E. Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi, eine Untersuchung zur paulinischen Begrifflichkeit*, 1933, who tries to explain the Pauline conception of the body of Christ on the basis of Gnostic speculations on aeons.

³³ F. J. Leenhardt, *Études sur l'Église dans le Nouveau Testament*, 1940, p. 40, takes a different view, however, and interprets the term as merely a 'concept of relationship'. The relation between the Church and the Danielic Son of Man which Leenhardt rightly stresses in connection with F. Kattenbusch's important work, 'Der Quellort der Kirchenidee', *Festgabe für A. v. Harnack*, 1921, p. 14, by saying 'this community is inseparable from its leader, the Messiah-Son of Man, who is at once both its head and its embodiment', leads to a much more concrete conception of the statements on the $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon$.

³⁴ The decisive argument for my conception of the $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon$ can only be given in the following section in connection with the idea of substitution.

hand, the body of Christ himself, the highest thing possible on earth, yet, on the other hand, it is ruled by Christ the head, like all the other parts of the creation to which his kingdom extends.

This dualism influences the life of the Church as the body of Christ: it is the suffering, crucified body, because it shares in a world where the σάρξ and sin still exist and where the subject-powers can still break free; but it is also the body of his resurrection, since Christ is already risen from the dead.³⁵

That as the body of Christ on earth the Church is the body of the crucified is made particularly clear in the important passage in Colossians 1.24, where Paul writes: 'in my flesh, I complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church.'³⁶ That the believers in Christ become one with Christ, become 'joint-heirs' with him, means, according to Romans 8.17, that they must share his sufferings if they are to share his glory. What every Christian individually experiences at Baptism when he enters the Church (Rom. 6.3 f.), dying with Christ and being raised up with him, characterizes the whole life of the Church. In so far as it is the body of Christ on earth it is the lowly and suffering Church—'drawn by the exalted Lord, it goes the way of the humiliated' (Kierkegaard).³⁷

On the other hand, it is also the body of the risen Lord, a spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν, I Cor. 15.44), since it was constituted by the πνεῦμα at Pentecost; πνεῦμα is its substance, and so every-one that is received into the Church in Baptism enters even now into a spiritual body, the only spiritual body that is already in existence, the Church, the earthly body of the exalted Christ. 'By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body' (I Cor. 12.13), and the Eucharist is already a concrete sharing in this spiritual body of the Church through the eating of the bread: 'The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body' (I Cor. 10.16 f.).³⁸ Since the body of Christ is incorporated in the community of the Church no man must eat for himself in the Eucharist (I Cor. 11.20 f.).

³⁵ In connection with the Eucharist this duality of the meaning of the body of Christ is very well brought out by A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, E.T., 1931, p. 270 f.

³⁶ The στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ mentioned in Gal. 6.17 should also be remembered in this context.

³⁷ S. Kierkegaard, *Einübung im Christentum, Ges. Werke*, vol. 9, 1924, p. 181.

³⁸ See, in addition to the passage in Schweitzer already mentioned (n. 35), especially J. Héring, *Le Royaume de Dieu et sa venue*, 1937, p. 228 f.

It is because it is the spiritual body of the risen Christ that such unworthy eating is so evil, and he is guilty who fails to 'discern the body' (I Cor. 11.27 f.). Paul even goes so far as to say that it is because of unworthy partaking of the Eucharist, that is, the risen body of Christ as he is incorporated in the Church, that there are so many 'weak and sickly' in the Corinthian Church and a number that 'sleep' (I Cor. 11.30).

The tension between present and future in the Church is not only due to the fact that it is the persecuted, suffering and crucified body of Christ and at the same time the resurrection-body, the spiritual body of Christ. It goes much further and also arises from the fact that, though as a gift offered by God the spiritual body of Christ is a reality in the midst of the earthly world doomed to destruction, it cannot exert its full influence owing to the unworthiness of its own members, so that this body in which nothing corruptible should remain still contains sin, disease and death. The reason is that the Church is made up of human beings who are still living in the carnal body, still living in sin. This brings us to the question of the membership of the Church which we intend to examine in relation to the question of membership of the *Regnum Christi*. The answer to this question will shed light on the ultimate relationship between the *Regnum Christi* and the Church. We shall have to proceed from the result which we have just reached: the Church of Christ forms the narrowly confined earthly setting of the *Regnum Christi* which Christ, the head of the whole creation, has chosen for his earthly body.

(4) *The Members of the Regnum Christi and the Members of the Church*

The fact that Christ, the head, has chosen and marked out the fellowship of the Church, one small part of creation, must have a special significance for the *Regnum Christi* as a whole. The members of the Church, who are at the same time members of the whole *Regnum Christi*, must participate in his government in a special way.

To be a member of a kingdom always means, on the one hand, being ruled and, on the other hand, sharing the government with the head, though being subordinate to him. Now we have here a supremely important difference between the *Regnum Christi* and the Church. As we have seen, all beings in heaven, on earth and under the earth belong to the *Regnum Christi*. All those invisible powers and authorities and their executive organs, the earthly states, are therefore members of this kingdom too. They are part of the *Regnum*

Christi and entitled to obedience and active support, especially from all those who are aware of the existence of the *Regnum Christi*. All earthly, material institutions which, while disengaged from the *Regnum Christi*, are extremely questionable and demonic, such as the bearing of the sword (Rom. 12.4), are ennobled, and state officials become 'God's servants', λειτουργοὶ θεοῦ (Rom. 13.6)³⁹ on receiving a place in the *Regnum Christi*. These earthly institutions are the things which 'are Caesar's' and which, according to the words of Jesus (Mark 12.17), are to be given to Caesar, as God is to be given the things that are God's. But this does not mean that the state has any independent right of its own.⁴⁰ The only reason why Caesar is to be given the things that are Caesar's is because he is included in the divine order of the *Regnum Christi* and God has given him power over these things so long as the present age lasts. The Church must not be an earthly state itself; for the Christian's 'state' is in the future, in heaven (Phil. 3.20; Heb. 11.10, 13-16; 12.22; 13.14; Rev. 21.2). But for that very reason the Christian knows that the earthly state, though not ultimate and divine in itself, is nevertheless a member of the *Regnum Christi* by the will of God, in so far as Christ's kingdom belongs to the present age.

Thus the angel-powers and their organs, the state authorities on earth, are governed by Christ and participate in his provisional kingdom in the way marked out for them. Nevertheless, they are members of his kingdom only very indirectly, since they are not necessarily aware of their role. Everything that Paul and Jesus say about subjection to Caesar and the state refers to a pagan state, which has no knowledge of Christ and his kingdom and of God the Father of Christ.⁴¹ But even a pagan state such as Rome can play a divinely ordained part in the *Regnum Christi* so long as it carries out its own task and thereby makes it possible for the Church, which

³⁹ The connection with the angel-powers is confirmed to some extent by the fact that in Heb. 1.14 the angels are called λειτουργικά πνεύματα εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστέλλόμενα.

⁴⁰ G. Kittel, *Christus und Imperator. Das Urteil der ersten Christenheit über den Staat*, 1939, p. 17, holds the opposite view.

⁴¹ One is entitled to ask, however, whether a pagan state can remain within its proper confines as a state at all. Otto Eck, *Urgemeinde und Imperium*, 1940, p. 105 f., answers the question on the basis of the late-Jewish conception that the Torah was well-known to the heathen and that 'all political order is an outcome of the Torah'. Keeping more closely to the New Testament, F. J. Leenhardt, *Le chrétien doit-il servir l'État?* 1939, has made the interesting attempt to consider Christian love of neighbour as the Christian basis of all secular justice, precisely in relation to Rom. 13.

is of such importance to the *Regnum Christi*, 'to lead a quiet and peaceable life' (I Tim. 2.2).

According to the New Testament the Christian must never oppose a state simply because it is pagan, but only if the state forsakes its proper task and deifies itself. The state that remains within its proper sphere belongs to the kingship of Christ, though all unwittingly. Since only the Christian is aware of the fact, such a state means more to him than to any other citizen. Inversely, the state's transgression of its rightful boundaries, though witnessed by non-Christians as well as Christians, will mean a much more terrible lapse from the Christian point of view, for the Christian will see it as a defection from the *Regnum Christi*, the unleashing of demonic power, the uprising of the 'beast'.

The fact that the members of the Church are conscious of all this, that they know that Christ rules, and are therefore members of the Kingdom of Christ consciously, is what distinguishes them as a Church from all the other members of the *Regnum Christi* who may be its servants unconsciously.

The central position which the Church occupies within the whole *Regnum Christi* should now be fairly clear. To grasp it completely, however, we must first see how from the very beginning the whole process of events led up to the Church. The whole witness of the Bible presupposes a divine scheme of salvation with the Church as the final goal: man was intended to rule over the rest of creation. He fell, and his fall involved the whole creation in the divine anathema: 'For your sake' (Gen. 3.17; Rom. 8.20). From sinful humanity God chose a community, the people of Israel, for the salvation of the world. Within this people, however, a further reduction took place, first of all, to a still smaller community, the 'remnant of Israel', the *qahal Yahweh* on whom devolves the role appointed by God. This 'remnant' was still further concentrated and reduced to one man who was alone able to assume the role of Israel, that is, the 'Servant of Yahweh' in Deutero-Isaiah, the 'Son of Man' in Daniel, who represents the 'people of the saints' (Dan. 7.13 f.). This one must enter history in the Son of God, Christ, who is to achieve by his vicarious death that for which the people of Israel have been chosen by God. Until the coming of Christ the scheme of salvation, therefore, took the shape of a progressive reduction: from humanity at large to the people of Israel and from the 'remnant of Israel' to Christ, in whom the whole process attains its centre, though it has not come to an end in him. It is now

a matter of travelling in the opposite direction: moving from the one to the many, so that the many may represent the one. The way now leads from Christ to those who believe in him, who know they are redeemed by faith in his vicarious death. The way now leads to the Church, which is the body of Christ, and which is now called to fulfil for the whole of humanity the task of the 'remnant', the 'people of the saints', and which, therefore, applies to itself the name of the 'remnant': *qahal Yahweh*, the Hebrew equivalent for ἐκκλησία, Church.

The process of salvation proceeds in two directions: from the many to the one: that is, the old covenant, and from the one to the many: the new covenant. The decisive fact of the death of Christ stands exactly midway between the two movements.

This is not merely a retrospective reconstruction of what has happened. The process is clearly documented in Galatians 3.6-4.7, where Paul takes as the starting-point of his argument the promise made to Abraham, and then points out that this promise to Abraham's offspring was fulfilled in the promise to the one, meaning Christ (3.16), who through his vicarious death redeemed those who were under the law (4.5). For the first time the way was clear for all who believe in Christ to become the descendants of Abraham (3.26). Through Baptism (3.27) they all enter into the promise which was given to the one. Now there are many, but these many are 'all one', πάντες εἰς, in Christ Jesus (3.28). Thus all are to become sons and heirs (4.4-7).

This is the history of the origin of the Church as the body of Christ considered within the context of the whole scheme of salvation. The Church as the body of Christ and the part it has to play in the *Regnum Christi* and later on in the Kingdom of God can only be understood on the basis of the concept of vicariousness which, in fact, provides the key to an understanding of the whole biblical concept of the scheme of salvation. The election of the people of Israel was already based on the idea of vicariousness: vicarious sacrifice for the human race which has fallen away from God. It then became concentrated in the tiny 'remnant', and still further in the figure of the 'Servant of Yahweh' on the one hand, and the 'Son of Man' on the other.

Since the 'Servant of Yahweh' fulfils the role which should have been fulfilled by the many, this figure of *Ebed Yahweh* is exceedingly variegated in Deutero-Isaiah, and Old Testament scholars have never completely solved the problem whether the 'servant' is an individual,

or the whole people of Israel, or merely the 'remnant'. The question is tied up with the fact that a concentration or reduction based on substitution took place before it was realized in a historical personality.

We find the idea of vicariousness recurring in the figure of the Son of Man. According to Daniel 7.13-27,⁴² the Son of Man represents the 'people of the saints'. It is significant that this is the very description which Jesus applied to himself, since it is based on the idea of vicariousness: by proclaiming that 'the Son of Man must suffer many things' (Mark 8.31), and that he came 'to serve and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10.45), he realized and combined in his person the Son of Man and the Servant of Yahweh, both of whom are rooted in the common conception of the representation of the many by the one.

As 'Son of Man' and 'Servant of Yahweh' Christ represents the 'people of the saints', the 'remnant of Israel', and therefore the whole of Israel and humanity, since Israel was chosen as representing the whole of humanity. The fact that Christ represents the whole of humanity is indicated by the term 'Son of Man' itself, for 'Son of Man', Aramaic *bar-nasha*, simply means 'human being'. The Pauline description of Christ as the second Adam (Rom. 5.12 f.; I Cor. 15.45 f.) is based on a similar idea.

We are now in a position to appreciate why the Church of Christ must be the body of Christ. Substitution by Christ, in whom the human race is summed up, remains the leading principle in the return from the one to the many. So the Church must be a human fellowship in which Christ, the one, is 'formed' (Gal. 4.19), in which he becomes incarnate, and this, too, is of outstanding significance for the whole creation because of the importance which, according to the divine plan, belongs to man within the creation, which is in any case grounded in Christ from the very beginning: 'in him were all things created' (Col. 1.16).⁴³

⁴² F. Kattenbusch, 'Der Quellort der Kirchenidee', *Festgabe f. A. v. Harnack*, 1921, has the merit of being the first to have applied the idea of the Son of Man=people of the saints to the Christian concept of the Church. T. W. Manson pointed out the connection of the Son of Man with the 'remnant' and the *Ebed Yahweh* in his very notable work, *The Teaching of Jesus*, 1935. On the relation to the body of Christ, see the short exposition on p. 232 f.

⁴³ In the New Testament it is merely presupposed that the dominion of man over creation, which was intended in the beginning at the creation of the world, will be realized in the new age, but it is stated expressly in the epistle of Barnabas, 6.18 f.

We have outlined the biblical scheme of salvation to show the surpassing importance of the Church within the *Regnum Christi* as a fellowship of human beings. In the last section we saw that the Church is the centre of this kingdom because it has been chosen to be the earthly setting of the body of Christ. It is now clear that the Church forms the centre, because it is the body of Christ as a human community which is the goal of the divine plan of salvation. The dominion which was prophesied for the Son of Man=people of the saints in Daniel 7.27 is fulfilled in the Church as the body of Christ.

The members of this fellowship are, therefore, not only aware of the position held by the other members, such as the state, within the *Regnum Christi*: they are aware, above all, of their own position as believers in redemption by the death of Christ; as believers in the kingship of Christ and in the Church as the body of Christ, which they themselves constitute. Therefore the fact that the Church is governed by the head and the Church shares in his government is more important for the *Regnum Christi* than the participation of all its other members. And this explains why in the final act of the *Regnum Christi* the members of the Church will reign in particularly close association with Christ and in the kingdom of a thousand years (Rev. 20.1), and also why they will sit in judgment on the other members of the *Regnum Christi* (I Cor. 6.3). They will also 'reign with him': συμβασιλεύσομεν (II Tim. 2.12).⁴⁴

But we have already seen that everything that is to take place in a concentrated form in that final act is typical of the whole previous and present kingship of Christ. Thus, according to I Corinthians 4.8, 'reigning with Christ' is to be conceived as a fact already,⁴⁵ and to this extent we ourselves already constitute a βασιλεία (Rev. 1.6).

That the human community of the Church exists is important for the creation which is summed up in the *Regnum Christi*, just as the fall of the first human beings had important consequences for creation in general. As Christ himself worked and suffered as man among men in his incarnation and died on the cross, and yet conquered the invisible powers and principalities by this earth-bound activity, so everything that happens in the body of Christ, that is, the Church of those who believe they are redeemed by the death of Christ, projects into the world of ἐπουράνια: through the Church

⁴⁴ Cf. *Epistle of Polycarp*, 5.2.

⁴⁵ Rightly explained by K. L. Schmidt, *T.W.N.T.*, article συμβασιλεύειν, i, p. 592, as a reigning 'with Christ'.

the manifold wisdom of God is now made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Eph. 3.10)—the wisdom of which it is written in I Corinthians 2.8 that 'the rulers of this age' did not know it when they 'crucified the Lord of glory'. It is the Church's destiny only to fight against the visible manifestations of the hostile powers but, according to Ephesians (6.12), this, too, is a fight 'against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places', that is to say, against the powers that have freed themselves from the ties binding them to the Kingdom of Christ.

Although the Church only works among men, except in the final act which will take place in the coming age, all its activity is important for the *Regnum Christi*, and the influence works both ways, since all the 'service' which the subject-angels perform in this kingdom is on behalf of 'those who are to inherit salvation' (Heb. 1.14). Likewise, according to Acts 5.31, God raised Christ up to his own right hand 'to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins', a further token of how everything is concentrated on the 'little flock' in whom Christ is 'formed' (Gal. 4.19). The *Regnum Christi* is promoted by this concentration, regardless of the visible success or failure of the Church, but not independently of the Church's faithful fulfilment of its task, of which we still have to speak.

(5) *The Church's Task in the Regnum Christi*

We have seen that as the body of Christ himself the Church is God's supreme gift, but the tension inside it is almost unsurpassable because it shares in the dualism inherent in the whole situation between the resurrection and the second coming of Christ: sin and death are present in the Church because it consists of human beings who though redeemed by faith are still sinful. Hence the paradox that whilst the body of Christ which represents the pivot of the *Regnum Christi* is given to us in the Church, we ourselves, sinful men, form this body! Thus the Church is not only the supreme gift of God, but is faced with a supreme task. The body is never completed but has to 'grow up into the head' (Eph. 4.15 f.; cf. also Col. 2.19). This growth is effected by God and the Spirit that constitutes the body, but it has to take place in human beings, and that is the real problem that faces the Church. It flows from the

definitions of the Church's function which we reached in the previous chapter.

Since it is an essential mark of the Church that, in contrast to the other members of the *Regnum Christi*, those whom Christ rules and who rule with Christ have knowledge of him, so the first task of the Church is to preach the gospel. Christ rules in the Church and through the Church by the witness that is borne to him. 'He who hears you, hears me'. The Church's preaching is concerned with the Kingdom of Christ; Christ has redeemed us by his death and resurrection by overcoming the powers and principalities. He reigns as *Kyrios Christos*. The Church has to strengthen its own members in this faith by preaching, and also in Baptism and in the Eucharist in which its nature as the body of Christ is shown forth with particular clarity.

The state supports the Church in all the tasks which it fulfils, consciously or unconsciously, as a member of the *Regnum Christi*; but where it prevents the free preaching of the gospel and demands a *Kyrios Kaisar* the Church will resist it courageously in its preaching and declare that it has fallen away from the *Regnum Christi*. It will openly confess its faith in the lordship of Christ. Since all power in heaven and on earth has been given to him, no sphere must be excluded from Christian preaching.

The preaching of the gospel must cover the whole period of the Church between Christ's ascension and second coming. For the end will only come when the gospel has been preached to all (Mark 13.10; Matt. 24.14).⁴⁶ This does not mean that all must be converted before the Kingdom of God can come, but that all must have at least heard the gospel. The coming of the Kingdom of God does not depend on whether the Church is great or small on the day which God has appointed for the end of the age. But the Church must do that to which it is called, preach the gospel to all.

It is always working to extend the space occupied by the Church in the *Regnum Christi* but it knows, all the same, that the further exercise of the kingship of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God are not dependent on the success or failure of its preaching. Nevertheless, it is important that the voice of the Church should never be wholly silent, even though it may be quite a small flock in whom Christ is formed. The 'growing of the Church into the

⁴⁶ See my article, 'Le caractère eschatologique du devoir missionnaire et de la conscience apostolique de St. Paul', in *R.H.P.R.*, 1936, p. 210 f., for a discussion of Paul's testimony to the same idea.

head' need not necessarily be a quantitative increase (Matt. 24.12), but it must be an ever-increasing insight, expressed in word and deed, into the significance of the Church for the rule of Christ.

The rule of Christ is preached in deeds as well as words, in the exercise of love and in suffering. The fact that Christ reigns is shown forth in the suffering of the Church. Christ has already overcome all the invisible powers by the cross, and the victory that he has achieved is also shown forth in the suffering of the Church, which is caused by the powers that free themselves for a time from their bondage to the *Regnum Christi* and manifest this in their attitude to the Church which is the centre of the *Regnum Christi*. The suffering of the Church refers back to the conquest of the invisible powers that has already taken place and it points forward to their final defeat.

Even should the Church shrink more and more in numbers, according to the New Testament it is all-important that the body of Christ should exist even in a small Church, that is, in the community of those who know and believe that in spite of everything Christ will continue to reign over everything that is in heaven, on earth and under the earth. It is vitally important for the rule of Christ that this knowledge should be preached to the world. No failure need discourage the Church in its work, since the greatest earthly failure that ever was is at the very centre of the faith of the New Testament: the cross of Christ, which, to the Christian, means victory over all hostile powers and the eschatological beginning of the present kingship of Christ, which can only be superseded by the Kingdom of God.

APPENDIX⁴⁷

On the interpretation of ἑξουσίαι (Rom. 13.1 f.) as angel-powers

It is true that the correctness of our present findings does not depend on taking the ἑξουσίαι in Romans 13.1 f. to mean the angel-powers (p.120 f.), and it does not stand or fall on that interpretation. But the relation between the *Regnum Christi*, the state and the Church which has been suggested here does provide additional support for the assumption that this interpretation of the ἑξουσίαι is correct.

This interpretation of the ἑξουσίαι of Romans 13.1 f., as stated by M. Dibelius in *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus*, 1909, and later

⁴⁷ See now also Dr. Cullmann's article, 'Zur neuesten Diskussion über die ἑξουσίαι in Röm. 13.1', *Theologische Zeitschrift*, Sept.-Oct. 1954, p. 321 f. [Ed.]

recommended by H. Schlier, 'Mächte und Gewalten im N. T.', *Theol. Blätter*, 1930, col. 292, and argued more comprehensively by G. Dehn, 'Engel und Obrigkeit', *Theol. Aufs. f. K. Barth*, 1936, and adopted by K. Barth (most recently in *Rechtfertigung und Recht*, *Theol. Studien*, no. 1, 1938) and K. L. Schmidt ('Das Gegenüber von Kirche und Staat in der Gemeinde des Neuen Testaments', *Theol. Blätter*, 1937, col. 1 f.), has been violently disputed by G. Kittel in *Christus und Imperator. Das Urteil der ersten Christen über den Staat*, 1939, in a special supplement, p. 48 f., and by F. J. Leenhardt in *Le chrétien doit-il servir l'État?* 1939, p. 36 f.; and, finally, Otto Eck in his *Urgemeinde und Imperium (Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie* 42, 3), 1940, p. 35, in a footnote (no. 3), imagines that it is sufficient to call these ἐξουσία theories 'adventurous' and 'completely absurd' without giving any reasons for this summary judgment.

The arguments produced by Kittel and Leenhardt against the interpretation do not seem to me to be valid. In particular I am not convinced by Kittel's reference to the fact that out of ninety cases (wrongly quoted as nineteen by Leenhardt, p. 35, n. 1), in about eighty in which the word ἐξουσία is found, only the normal sense of 'any kind of power that a person has' is implied (p. 50). That the singular is, in fact, used in this sense is not in dispute. We are merely concerned with the plural ἐξουσίαι or the plural use of the singular πᾶσα ἐξουσία, and in this respect the statistics are quite definitely in favour of the meaning 'angel-powers'.

Kittel's reference (p. 50) to the fact that, according to W. Förster, *T. W. N. T.*, article, ἐξουσία, ii, p. 559 f., there is evidence of the singular and plural being used by secular writers in connection with ἀρχαί in the sense of 'secular authority' is more important. On the other hand, this is not valid as an argument against considering the ἐξουσίαι of Romans 13.1 as a reference to the angel-powers, since Kittel joins Förster in citing the other authentic fact that the late Jewish and New Testament conception of ἐξουσίαι as angel-powers is quite unknown in secular Greek.

When Paul spoke, in Romans 13.1, of the state being the executive organ of these angel-powers, he probably had in mind the secular meaning of ἐξουσίαι (state). But for Paul the important thing is that the powers are ordained by God. In I Corinthians 2.8 he was probably thinking of the secular meaning of ἀρχοντες, that is, Herod and Pilate, though undeniably it is the invisible rulers, the ἀρχευντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, who are meant in the first place.

There is no question here of an alternative and certainly not of a 'metaphysical drama unrelated to historical events' (Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 39, n.).

It must also be stated that Kittel is wrong to regard my interpretation of the ἐξουσίαι as a 'devaluation' of the state *in malam partem* (p. 50). He proceeds from this false presupposition when he states that the passage in I Peter 2.13-17, which refers to Romans 13.1 and offers as it were the first exegesis of the Pauline statement, excludes the possibility of this interpretation, since such high honour is conferred on the ἀνθρωπίνη κτίσις, to which the author of I Peter assigns state authority in this context. This honour is, however, perfectly compatible with the character of *exousia*. In Romans 13.4 the almost incomparable dignity implied in the description of the state as 'God's servant' must be taken quite seriously even though and just because we know that the angel-powers ordained by God are behind the state.

The passage from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (10.2) in which, according to Kittel (p. 52, cf. also p. 32) it is impossible to understand ἐξουσίαι as angel-powers, does not appear to me to contradict my interpretation in the slightest. For, like Paul in Romans 13, Polycarp supports the case for the most loyal possible Christian attitude to the ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι, which are 'ordained by God'. But the fact that the same Polycarp, who wants the state to be shown every honour so long as it really stays within the τάξις, the 'order' of God (τεταγμένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, 10.2), resists the same state unto death when it requires the κύριος Καῖσαρ of him (8.2), that is to say, when it falls away from this 'order' and its demonic power is unleashed, is particularly easy to understand if one construes the ἐξουσίαι as the angel-powers, but does not interpret their role dualistically, but as we have done in the present study, in the sense of the *Regnum Christi* to which these powers are subject, but from which they are able to obtain temporary release. An approach like Polycarp's is exactly parallel to the New Testament attitude to the state which presupposes an awareness of the angel-powers which stand behind the state and the part which they play in the *Regnum Christi*.

The whole of Kittel's argument is based on a false dualistic conception of the angel-powers, which leaves out of account the fact that there is an intervening *Regnum Christi* in which angel-powers are present, though subject to Christ. The concept of the *Regnum Christi* excludes any form of dualism.

The same must be said of Irenaeus, to whom Kittel refers and who only rejects this construction because he interprets it dualistically, which is just what it is not. The first to refer to the passage quoted by Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 40 n. (*Adv. Haer.*, V, 24.1) in the context of this discussion was Harald Fuchs in *Der geistige Widerstand gegen Rom in der antiken Welt*, 1938, p. 59. This passage, which does, in fact, expressly reject the application of ἐξουσίαι in Romans 13.1 to angel-powers, only concerns a false, heretical, because dualistic interpretation of this explanation, as though the state thereby became an institution inimical to God, whereas to a correct interpretation of this explanation, it is God's servant just because it is the organ of those ἐξουσίαι which are subject to Christ, in other words, because it is a member of the *Regnum Christi*.

That Irenaeus only interprets the explanation (ἐξουσίαι=angel-powers) dualistically, that is to say, misinterprets it, is related to the fact that in his struggle against Gnostic dualism he exaggerates the rectilinear development from creation to redemption and completely leaves the present *Regnum Christi* out of account. We have seen that even in a confessional text which came down to him (*Adv. Haer.*, I, 10.1) he interprets what is said there about the present reign of Christ, in particular, his reign over the invisible 'powers' eschatologically. From this point of view Irenaeus can only understand the interpretation of ἐξουσίαι as angel-powers in the form in which it had been advocated by the Gnostic heretics.

In conclusion, I should like to say with great emphasis that the view that angel-powers are behind the state is stated so clearly by Paul in I Corinthians 2.7 f. and 6.3, quite apart from Romans 13.1, that it would be quite unthinkable that he should have used the word ἐξουσίαι in Romans 13.1 in any other sense than that of angel-powers with which he was familiar. I think I have shown in the present study that it is impossible to banish the idea of angels and powers to the periphery of Pauline theology as has been done by Kittel, *op. cit.* (p. 51) and Leenhardt, *op. cit.* (p. 36).

5

The Return of Christ

The New Testament Hope

Translated from *Le Retour du Christ*,
3rd edition, 1948, Neuchâtel

*The Return of Christ*¹

IT CONNOTES a wrong approach to the problem of the hope of the New Testament to reduce it to the question: what is the date of the return of Jesus Christ? That is how the hope of the New Testament is usually distorted by the sects. They make this question of the date of Christ's second coming, which cannot possibly be regarded as central from the standpoint of the gospel as a whole, and which should, in fact, be reserved for God and not concern us at all, the exclusive theme around which all their discussion of the hope of the New Testament is made to revolve. Unfortunately, the Church has too often imitated the sects: it has investigated the problem of the date of Christ's return as though that was the all-important question. Even theology has made the same mistake. In reality, though the question is certainly raised now and then in the New Testament, it remains, as we shall see, on the periphery; it never constitutes the centre or the nucleus of the apostolic teaching on hope. To make it the starting-point and nerve-centre of this teaching is to obtain a disordered, distorted and disfigured hope which is not the hope of the New Testament at all.

That is why we shall not take as our own starting-point those sayings of Jesus which seem to fix the irruption of the Kingdom of God more or less chronologically, as is the case with the so-called school of 'thoroughgoing eschatology', but we shall deal with them in their place and in accordance with their true importance.

In the four chapters that follow we shall try to answer the following four fundamental questions:

1. What is the place of hope in the New Testament?
2. Why is this hope a hope in the return of the Lord?
3. What is the fundamental significance of the proclamation of the nearness of the Kingdom of God?
4. What conclusions must be drawn from this hope for our Christian life in the Church?

¹ A lecture delivered to the old members of the Christian associations of students in German-speaking Switzerland in 1943 (but first published in French [Ed.]).

(1) *What is the place of Hope in the New Testament?*

All thinking about hope is futile if it is not seen in its due place within the framework of the total witness of the gospel. The sects which discredit the Christian hope by their teaching rely on passages which do, in fact, occur in the New Testament. Their mistake, their heresy, is not that they introduce extra-biblical elements, but that they isolate certain truths and remove them from their context. Now it is impossible to speak accurately about hope without taking as one's point of departure the decisive event that has already taken place, and the faith which looks to the past and which also sees in the present the accomplishment of the divine plan of salvation. Furthermore, the source of nearly all the heresies is that they uproot a particular element of the truth of the gospel, isolate it and set it up as an absolute. The history of the Church provides ample instances in support of this statement. The element which is thus set at the centre of things is usually a genuine, sound and trustworthy element, but by being suddenly isolated it becomes a source of heresy. The apocalyptic sects which have always existed have wrongly isolated the Christian hope in this way. The harmony of the Gospels is thereby destroyed because these sects speak of a hope directed towards the future and ignore the faith which looks to the past and the present: in other words, they ignore the whole history of the plan of divine salvation. In the New Testament hope is, on the contrary, based on the faith which rests partly on the historical facts of the expiatory death of Christ and his resurrection, and partly on the present fact of the invisible kingship of Christ. Any hope that is not the final link in this chain, the final assurance based on this story of salvation, is not hope as understood by the New Testament.

Merely to wait, without believing in the decisive events which have already taken place in the past and the present, without knowing that because of these decisive events man has entered into a final epoch, is to misuse the New Testament, however great the number of isolated verses which can be quoted in support of this false mode of hoping. Such waiting destroys the harmony of the gospel. Hope cannot function without faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, without faith in the kingship of the Lord in his Church, in which the work of his love is pursued. To speak accurately of hope there is no need at all to isolate it and thereby run the risk of falsifying and dechristianizing it. Each element has its own particular place in the good news of salvation, and together they form a

harmony which must be respected if heresy is to be avoided. To indicate the special place of hope within this total harmony it is sufficient to recall the words of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 13.13: 'And now abide faith, hope, love'. Faith comes before hope and love comes after it as the crowning of the three. This is the order, the chain in which hope must be set as a link.

But we must now mention the opposite danger: to eliminate hope, to endeavour to be contented with faith and love, to consider hope a mere concession to the time-bound thought of the apostolic age is to do just as much violence to the gospel message as setting up hope as an absolute. To reject hope is to mutilate the New Testament message of salvation in which every element is essential to the whole. This message begins with Creation and ends with the new creation on the last day, which is its goal and end. Between these two moments there is set the decisive event of the cross, which is past history for us but the basis of our salvation. Between these two moments is set all the intermediate time of the Church in which we ourselves are living.

This general history of salvation may be outlined as follows. God created the world as well as man. He has instituted man as lord over his whole creation, but the fall and its consequence, death, which has established its rule on earth, has made necessary a history of salvation which develops, according to the divine plan, by periods which are clearly determined by the two principles of election and substitution: the election of the people of Israel for the salvation of humanity, the election of a remnant of this people which is intended to represent the whole of Israel, the election of a unique 'man', the suffering 'Servant of God', who takes upon himself the sins of the world, the election of Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross and resurrection constitute the centre of the history of salvation. Henceforth the course of the story is inverted: it no longer proceeds from plurality to unity but from unity to the plurality of the saved. The Church is the body of this one and only Christ; it aspires to embrace the whole of humanity, and it will itself be followed by the final act of divine omnipotence, when God, as in the first creation, will decide in his sovereign act (κέλευσμα, I Thess. 4.16) to constitute the *new creation* by means of the spirit of life. The Christian expectation of the end, the Christian hope for the future are part of the unfolding of this story, they are situated on the line which, starting from creation and passing through the people of Israel, the remnant, through Christ, the one, through the gospel and converted and

ransomed humanity, opens out on the new creation. This line is a temporal line and it is characteristic of the Christian revelation.

It is, however, absolutely foreign to Greek thought. The only time known to the Greeks is cyclic time which returns eternally in an infinite circle. Thus the Greek thinker is unable to conceive that salvation can and must be accomplished in time. For him salvation always means liberation from time, an escape from the framework of the eternal return of all beings and all things. The Bible teaches that the unfolding of time itself is determined by the history of God in time. The New Testament lays even stronger emphasis than the Old on this concept of linear time. The New Covenant throws this process of salvation in greater relief than the Old by introducing the present as an interim period with its own autonomous and essential significance between the decisive past event of the death and resurrection of Christ on the one hand, and the final fulfilment of the return of Christ on the other.

In the Church of Christ, eschatology is, in fact, an absolutely chronological concept, and it cannot be conceived as the expression of 'our permanent availability for existential decision' (Bultmann). Eschatology must not be interpreted so metaphysically as to dispel its substance altogether.² The eschatology of the New Testament, the hope of the Church of Christ, is not a hope in some kind of reality which is always available to us in the world beyond. It is not hope in a 'beyond' as opposed to a 'below', but hope in a 'then' as opposed to a 'now'. It awaits the age which is to come, which is to succeed the present age. It is essential to recognize the specifically temporal character of eschatology. It is vital to maintain the temporal character of the Christian hope. It can never be stated too clearly or too loudly that in the New Testament, time is not a reality hostile to God but, on the contrary, the means of grace by which God intends man's salvation.³

² Cf. Folke Holmström, *Das eschatologische Denken der Gegenwart*, Gütersloh, 1936.

³ This neglect of the value of time brings in its train the three heresies which usually go together: (1) the rejection of the Old Testament, that is, its historical and contingent facts; (2) Docetism, that is, the refusal to attach any importance, from the point of view of salvation, to the unique and historically commonplace event of the incarnation of Christ or his shameful death on the cross; (3) the rejection of eschatology. Once the biblical concept of linear time is replaced by the Greek concept of cyclic time, once the metaphysical dualism of the 'here below' and the 'beyond' takes the place of the biblical dualism of the 'present age' and the 'age to come', one inevitably succumbs to each of these

To the question which forms the theme of this opening chapter we can therefore reply: according to the New Testament, hope can only be discussed within the unity of the history of salvation of which it forms an indissoluble and essential element, since the history of salvation embraces past, present and future.

(2) *Why is the New Testament Hope a Hope in the Return of the Lord?*

We have already answered this question by showing how the whole history of salvation is directed towards Christ the Lord. From the creation to the new creation the whole course of the work of God has Christ as its centre. He is the mediator of salvation for his people, Israel. But his mediatory work is not confined to man. He is the mediator for the whole of creation, including the human race that inhabits it, because the human race, created in Adam in the image of God, is intended to reign over all the earth, as ordained by his Lord. This human solidarity with creation was manifested at the time of the fall, when the earth was cursed because of the sin of Adam and Eve. That is why the deliverance of creation is bound up with man's salvation, with the work of Christ, who thus becomes the Saviour of the world.

In the New Testament the story of salvation is therefore identical with the story of Christ. This assertion is based on the line that runs through the whole Bible and constitutes its unity: Christ saves all men in his incarnation, in his suffering and death, because from the very beginning he was, according to God's eternal plan, the Saviour

three heresies. It will suffice to quote as examples not only Gnosticism, but also all the modern philosophical distortions of the New Testament. The rejection or, at least, the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament goes hand in hand with an elimination or a falsification of biblical eschatology as well as a Docetist christology. It must not be imagined that the liberal interpretation of Jesus Christ as purely man is sufficient to eliminate Docetism. In reality this heresy is not primarily concerned with the human or divine character of Jesus, but with the value for salvation of his historical incarnation as such. Docetism is, in the last analysis, a negation of the meaning of time for man's salvation. It begins as soon as the attempt is made to single out from the traditional elements of the story of Jesus, those which are important for our salvation and those which are not. Such an attitude betrays a failure to grapple with the historical facts before forming one's standards of judgment and selection. As an exegete and historian, Albert Schweitzer has rightly discerned and denounced this error committed by so many modern historians of the life of Jesus. But as a dogmatist he has rendered himself guilty of the same error by trying to eliminate eschatology from the gospel, after having recognized its capital importance.

of the world, who fulfils the intention which God has towards the creation and towards man, made in his image.

The fundamental passages in the New Testament in which Christ is described as mediator are John 1.3, 'all things were made through the Word (=Christ), and without the Word was not anything made that was made'; Hebrews 1.2, 'Through the Son also he made the worlds'; I Corinthians 8.6, 'But to us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we exist'. This last text is the origin of all the creeds, which were later divided into several parts: the two articles are not yet separated as they were to be later on, as though only God himself and not Christ, too, had a part to play in creation.⁴ In Colossians 1.16, too, we read: 'In him (Christ) were all things created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities'. Thus the testimony of the New Testament affirms unanimously that Christ has participated in the whole plan of divine salvation from the very beginning and at all times. He was at the beginning of creation. By his redemptive act he stands at the centre of the history of salvation, which has the whole of creation as its setting and object. This is what the Gospels mean when they tell how the earth itself trembled at the moment of the redemptive death. This death of Christ, who triumphs over death and hell, proclaims the reconciliation achieved between God on the one side and humanity, or rather, the whole *cosmos*, on the other. Henceforth the invisible powers themselves are subject to God. Colossians 1.19, 'For it pleased the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, through him to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven'. The old confession of faith quoted by Paul in Philippians 2.6-11 tells that God has 'highly exalted' the Christ who humbled himself even to the death of the cross, that he has made him Lord over all things, that, 'in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth and things under the earth'. Similarly we find in I Peter 3.22 a confession of faith according to which Christ has ascended to heaven, with all the angels and authorities and powers made subject to him.

Thus, according to the New Testament, just as Christ already participates in creation as mediator, so the work of redemption which he has accomplished for man extends to the whole universe.

⁴ Cf. O. Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, E.T., 1949.

This is why the new creation, towards the fulfilment of which the whole plan of divine salvation tends, also depends on Christ. The decisive event has already taken place, it is true, but the end has not yet arrived. It is still possible for the forces and powers that have already been vanquished to manifest themselves within certain limits. Sin and death have not yet been destroyed and if the Holy Spirit is already at work, it has not yet re-created the substance of the world. This is why we are all waiting, and, according to Romans 8.19, the whole creation, as well as man, shares in this waiting. 'The whole creation waits with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God. For all creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it (Adam). We live in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from bondage to corruption, to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans in a common travail until now.'

And so, according to the New Testament, all things are involved in the process of salvation of which Christ is the centre and the promoter. The creation, redemption, and also the expectation of the final consummation, depend on the death of Christ. This fulfilment will be nothing less than the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (II Pet. 3.13).

This is why Christ will return to earth. The decisive event, like the first decisive event which took place under Pontius Pilate, will take place on earth, because matter itself has to be re-created.

It is true that the New Testament tells us nothing about this return, but speaks of an arrival of Christ who comes, and not of Christ who returns. Only in the farewell discourses of St. John's Gospel do we find the assertion: he will come again. All the other passages simply say, he will come. In secular usage both the Greek words used in these verses (*παρουσία* and *ἐπιφάνεια*) mean the appearance of a king in his glory. Now the New Testament makes a perfectly clear distinction between the coming of Christ in his glory and his first coming in humility. Substantially, if not formally, we are entitled to speak of a return of Jesus Christ. It is he who, as always, in association with the divine plan of salvation, will usher in the final act by triumphing definitively over the authorities and powers (I Cor. 15.24 f.) which he had already stripped of their power in his resurrection (II Tim. 1.10).

The hope of the New Testament can, therefore, only be a hope in the return of the Lord if, as we have tried to show, the whole

message of the New Testament, of which it is one of the elements, culminates in Christ, the Saviour of man and of the *cosmos*, the beginning, centre and fulfilment of the whole history of salvation from the first to the new creation. Christ as mediator in the past and present must also be mediator in the future. It is only after everything, absolutely everything, has been subjected by him to the Father that the Son will, according to I Corinthians 15.28, 'become subject to him who made all things his subjects, so that God may be all in all'. Only then will his role of mediator come to an end. Like the first decision of the cross and resurrection, these final events must take place on earth. Christ must therefore return as the glorious Saviour, this time surrounded by his own, to inaugurate the new age (I Thess. 4.14). We might therefore reply to the question which forms the subject of this chapter, in the words of Hebrews 13.8: 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever', that is to say, until the new age which is to come. At the beginning of this new period, when time will yield to eternity, he will still play the part of fulfiller and judge.

To know the real hope of the New Testament it is therefore not necessary, as has unfortunately happened only too often, to set out from a selfish point of view, asking, What will my fate be? Rather, it is necessary to consider the plan of salvation which God is pursuing *vis-à-vis* the world as a whole. How ironical that the Christian Church is constantly reproached with concentrating all its interest on the selfish happiness of the individual in the world beyond! To imagine that such a caricature does justice not only to Christianity but to the New Testament itself is to display total ignorance, since, unlike the belief in the immortality of the soul professed by Greek philosophy, the biblical hope of resurrection sees the destiny of the individual merely as a consequence flowing from the total work of Christ. That is why the resurrection of our 'mortal bodies' (Romans 8.11) will only take place at the end of time: individual death will not be followed by an immediate escape from time. To be sure, the secure eschatological possession of the Spirit is already a real event in the Church. Those who have died and who die in Christ are in a new state: they are raised up to Christ and are 'with him' 'in Paradise' (Luke 23.43; I Thess. 5.10; Phil. 1.23; II Cor. 5.8). But they still remain in time, they are waiting (cf. the question of the martyrs in Revelation 6.10: 'How long, O Lord, holy and true?'). It would be a distortion of the New Testament conception of time to say: Those who have died in Christ are already living outside time and

are already participating in all that the Church expects for the end of the world, that is, the resurrection of the body and the putting on of the *σῶμα πνευματικόν* which really depends on the return of Christ to earth and the re-creation of matter itself.⁵

The line of the history of salvation which we sketched in the first chapter is therefore identical with the line of the work of Christ himself. He fulfils his role of mediator for man and therefore for the whole universe. According to the New Testament, to hope can only be to hope for his return.

(3) *What is the Fundamental Significance of the Proclamation of the Nearness of the Kingdom of God?*

We have already mentioned the tension which characterizes the unfolding of the history of salvation in the New Testament. The decisive event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ has already taken place; but the end has not yet arrived. This statement explains the New Testament conception of the present time, or, to put it more precisely, it enables us to understand the relation of present to future time. We have established that the unfolding of the divine plan takes place and that God uses time to fulfil his intention on the earth and for the earth. God is the Lord of time (Rev. 1.4), of the past and the future as much as the present; we must therefore not attempt to usurp his Lordship with our computations of the date of the irruption of his kingdom. Let us remember, rather, the warning which is repeated so often: 'Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming' (Matt. 24.42). The master of the house does not know when the thief will come (Luke 12.39); the virgin does not know when the bridegroom will come. Paul reiterates this in I Thessalonians 5.2: 'the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night'. It is God who in his omnipotence and by his Word will fix and ordain the final moment (I Thess. 4.16). As in the first act of creation, the new world, too, will appear at his command: 'Let there be light!' And all our human activities cannot possibly bring about this final moment. Modern exegetes are almost unanimous on this point, that the kingdom will come from God alone, quite independently of human desires and actions. Human knowledge has no more access to this 'Day of the Lord' than human

⁵ For this question cf. O. Cullmann, 'La foi en la Résurrection et l'espérance de la Résurrection dans le Nouveau Testament' (*Études théologiques et religieuses*, 1943, p. 3 f.)

will. 'But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' (Mark 13.32). This verse is a clear and solemn declaration, and all the more important because it is stated elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt. 11.27) that none knows the Father truly except the Son. Nowhere is man's inability to fathom the divine mysteries stated with such force. The risen Christ himself replies to the inquisitive and impatient questions of the disciples in a similar way: 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority' (Acts 1.6, 7). How, in the face of such statements, have the sects been able to make the computation of the date of the coming of the kingdom the very centre of the hope of the New Testament? How have the exegetes and theologians been able to regard this point as the very essence of biblical eschatology? The error they have committed is unjustifiable.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that at the beginning of and throughout the whole preaching of the gospel we are told: 'the Kingdom of God is at hand'. What does this sentence mean? Does it tie down the coming of the kingdom to a definite date or to an event in the history of salvation, the consummation of the work of Christ? Does it simply mean that the kingdom will come in a given age and generation? If so, it would contradict all the other very explicit passages in the New Testament about our inability to know the date of the coming of the kingdom. It is *a priori* hardly likely that the fundamental point about the announcement of the imminence of the kingdom would be an indication of the moment of its irruption. Nevertheless, three verses, all of which record some words of Jesus himself, do seem to contain an indication of that kind. They are as follows. Mark 9.1, 'Truly, I say to you, some of those standing here shall not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power'; Matthew 10.23, 'Truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel, before the Son of Man comes'; Mark 13.30, 'This generation will not pass away before all these things take place'.

It is not easy to interpret these statements, and there exists, in fact, a whole series of different explanations. We can only mention the main ones here.⁶ Do not let us forget in any case the

⁶ A. Schweitzer is not the first to have realized the problem these verses present. But he has attached an importance to the problem out of all proportion to the truth of the New Testament. To realize that the question had been seen for a

overwhelming number of clear, explicit statements already quoted concerning the impossibility of knowing the date of the end. If we bear in mind the texts of which the meaning is perfectly clear we shall not attach unwarranted and exaggerated importance to the problem presented by these three controversial passages.⁷

To begin with, I should like to mention the recent explanation that has been provided for Matthew 10.23, according to which there is no question here of any indication of the date. Like St. Paul in Romans 11.25, Jesus is setting the conversion of Israel in relation to the end of time. He is content to say: you disciples, you will not achieve this conversion: that is why you flee from one city to another.⁸ On the other hand, however, according to Schweitzer, Jesus believed that the kingdom was to appear in his own lifetime, when the disciples would still be on their journeys. Quite recently, two new exegeses of Mark 13.30 have been suggested. According to the first, the γενεά (race or generation) mentioned in the text also refers to the Jews who will be preserved until the end, when they will be converted (Rom. 11.25).⁹ According to the second, γενεά has the same meaning as in the verses in which Jesus speaks of this corrupt and perverse generation. The word has the general sense of 'sort of men' and proclaims that the evil nature of man will last to the final day.¹⁰

There may be an element of truth in some of these suggestions. At any rate they show that the meaning is anything but obvious. But none of them is entirely satisfactory. The word γενεά used in Mark 13.30 certainly has a chronological sense and the three passages undoubtedly refer to the generation alive at the time of Jesus. Even

long time before Schweitzer it is only necessary to consult one of the old editions of the Meyer series. For example, in his sixth edition of 1876 H. A. W. Meyer devoted a long paragraph to Matt. 24, and he did not evade or minimize the difficulties. In opposition to the Tübingen exegetes, Baur, Hilgenfeld, Zeller, who sought to extend to the year 130 and even beyond the generation (γενεά) mentioned in Matt. 24.34, during whose lifetime the destruction and the *parousia* were to come, Meyer asserts explicitly that the generation in question was the one living when Jesus delivered his discourse.

⁷ The so-called school of 'thoroughgoing eschatology' commits a similar error of perspective.

⁸ Cf. J. Schniewind on this passage in *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*. W. Michaelis also adheres to this explanation in an article against M. Werner, 'Die grosse Enttäuschung', *Kirchenfreund*, 76th year, 1942, p. 226 f.

⁹ Cf. J. Schniewind on this passage in *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*.

¹⁰ Cf. W. Michaelis, *Der Herr verzichtet nicht seine Verheissung*, Berne, 1942, p. 30.

if Matthew 10.23 and Mark 13.30 could be given a different interpretation, there would still be Mark 9.1, which indicates quite explicitly that 'some of those standing here' will still be living when the kingdom arrives. It must be noted, however, that the text has *τινες* (some). This term rules out Schweitzer's view that the kingdom was to arrive during Jesus's own lifetime.¹¹ In fact, Jesus seems to have envisaged the lapse of at least several decades before the arrival of the kingdom, since he says that 'some' of his contemporaries would survive to see it. Other references in the Gospels also presuppose a certain passage of time between the death of Christ and his return. In Mark 14.62, before the high priest, Jesus distinguishes between the moment when the Son of Man will sit at the right hand of God and the moment when he will return. According to Mark 13.10 and parallel passages the gospel must be preached to all nations before the end.

Be that as it may, it must be recognized that in the early Church, just as much as in Mark 9.1, Matthew 10.23 and Mark 13.30 no one reckoned on the period between the ascension and the return of the Master lasting for centuries.

Does this chronological limitation of the *parousia* constitute the nucleus of the hope of the New Testament, as is claimed by the so-called school of 'thoroughgoing eschatology'? We have already seen, particularly in the light of Mark 13.30, that this is by no means the case. Certainly Jesus did not reckon on the period of waiting lasting more than a few decades: but this does not affect the essence of the hope of the gospel. The announcement of the proximity of the kingdom has quite a different bearing for Jesus and early Christianity. As far as St. Paul is concerned, we have evidence of this in the evolution of his thought regarding the question: will the kingdom come while I am still alive? When writing I Thessalonians he believed that Christ would return during his lifetime ('Then *we* who are left alive, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air' 4.17). When he wrote Philippians and II Corinthians he no longer reckoned on this possibility. But this evolution in his thinking did not affect the content of his hope in the slightest, nor did it modify his certainty that the kingdom was still imminent. The question of the actual date is not decisive. The same is true of II Peter. This late letter quotes Psalm 90 in this connection: 'A thousand years with the

¹¹ In *Der Herr verzieht nicht seine Verheissung*, W. Michaelis particularly insists on this point.

Lord are as one day'. This quotation allows for the possibility that the expectation may last for centuries and that man knows nothing about its duration. Yet the hope has lost nothing of its pristine freshness and intensity. We may therefore conclude that the limitation of the expectation of the *parousia* to the generation alive at the time of Jesus is not essential, though it is attested by various passages in the New Testament.

What, then, is the fundamental meaning of this nearness of the kingdom which is reaffirmed so often in the gospel? It means that the kingdom has, in fact, drawn nearer with Christ, that time has made a bond with him in advance of the event, that with him we have entered into the final period of time in the present world. 'The kingdom is at hand' means that it has come near (that is the exact meaning of the Greek perfect used in this sentence). The appearance of Christ is a decisive event in the time-table of the divine plan. We are in the final phase of the period, the duration of which we do not know. Thus the preaching of the nearness of the kingdom determines the present more than it characterizes the future. Such was in all probability the certainty which Jesus himself entertained. According to Jesus himself, his death is the decisive event which ushers in the coming of the kingdom. The prophecies of the passion repeat that 'the Son of Man must suffer' (Mark 8.31, etc.); he must play the part of the Servant of God for the sake of humanity; he inserts his own death into the framework of the history of salvation. According to Matthew 12.39 the only sign that will be given to man is the sign of the prophet Jonah. Let us remember, finally, the words of the Last Supper.

Taking the certainty, so clearly attested, of Jesus himself, we might even wonder if in the three verses we have quoted he was thinking equally of the contemporary generation as the generation which was to witness the decisive event of his death.¹² Be that as it may, whether or not Jesus considered that the actual date of his death would coincide with that of the irruption of the kingdom, according to the witness of the Synoptics he certainly did see in his passion and death the fulfilment of his earthly work of preparation for the kingdom. The essential element in the nearness of the kingdom is therefore not the final date but the certainty that the

¹² A. Schweitzer admits that this meaning is only found again in a few other words of Jesus. He believes that at the close of his ministry he changed his opinion: the kingdom would not come in his own lifetime but would coincide with the moment of his death.

expiatory work of Christ on the cross constitutes the decisive stage in the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Such was the certainty of the New Testament as a whole, including the epistles of Paul and the other writings. There is no hiatus between the hope of Jesus and that of the early Church. That is why these three solitary and unique sentences, handed down by tradition, which speak of the imminence of the kingdom, almost giving the precise date, did not confront the early Christians with an insoluble problem, since they turned the eye of faith not to the periphery, to this restriction of the expectation of the kingdom to the present generation, but to the centre, to the decisive act of the death and resurrection of Christ. The only difference between the hope of Jesus himself and the hope of the New Testament derives from the fact that when the Gospels and Epistles were written the decisive event had already taken place.¹³

¹³ One final point remains to be cleared up: if the promise of Jesus and the hope of the early Church accord with one another, since the death and resurrection of Jesus constitute the decisive events for both of them, it must nevertheless be admitted that in the three statements of Jesus which we have studied, the first and the last divine decision are not distinguished. From this point of view it does seem that there is a hiatus between the eschatological promise of Jesus and the hope of the early Church.

I should like, however, to recall once more that certain eschatological references of Jesus interpose a possible interim period between his resurrection and his return. Above all, it is important to see that the temporal tension between the two motifs 'all is finished' and 'the end is not yet come', which are so characteristic of the time of the Church, is already to be found during the historical ministry of Jesus. In his own lifetime he sees Satan falling from heaven, though he knows that he will only triumph over the powers at his death. Before him death must already retreat, *before* his resurrection the Holy Spirit is already at work: the sick are healed and the dead return to life. No doubt those who returned to life, such as the young man of Nain and Lazarus, will die again; no doubt the risen bodies of many saints, to which Matt. 27.52 refers, are not yet σώματα πνευματικά. Nevertheless, an anticipation of the end already exists wherever Jesus is present. 'If by the finger of God I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.' This does not prevent Jesus believing in his return on the clouds of heaven after his death.

The question of the demoniac in Matt. 8.29 is clear evidence that the same tension which characterizes the time of the Church already existed at the time of the ministry of Jesus. 'Have you come here to torment us *before the time*?' (πρὸ καιροῦ) the man possessed with demons asks. When Jesus is present the end irrupts into the very heart of the present. Thus his transfiguration is an anticipation of his bodily resurrection.

In Jesus, but only in him, the temporal tension which exists between the present age and the age to come is already abolished, though his work continues to develop in time. That is why the Gospel of John mingles the three

It is from him that henceforth fulfilment is expected and hoped for. The whole time which is in progress at present—and we do not know how long it will last—is henceforth the end-time, the time in which in the Church the decisive and final moment of the death and resurrection of Christ develops. This *leitmotiv* of the hope founded on the resurrection cannot be reduced or eliminated by the delay of the *parousia*. Although we admit that early Christianity did not reckon on a delay of several centuries, and although this fact has a real psychological significance, it does not affect the theological truth of the irreducible sequence of the various periods of salvation: the historical incarnation of Christ—the present but invisible lordship of the *κύριος*—the return of the Lord. There may be impatience and disillusionment, but in the light of the resurrection the divine plan remains firm and unshakeable. That is why the question of the duration of the final phase cannot annul the certainty of the bond of faith in the past and present with hope in the future. And in the light of the divine plan as revealed and realized, the New Testament sets aside all the impatient and indiscreet enquiries into the *χρόνοι* and the *καίροι* as unsound (cf. Acts 1.7 and the two epistles to the Thessalonians).

The essential thing to remember is: 'Children, it is the last hour' (I John 2.18).

It is the action of the Holy Spirit which testifies that from now on we are living in the last age of time. This last age is a fragment of the future, the only part of the coming age which exists in the present age. It is the Holy Spirit who will transform matter at the end of time, who will re-create a new world and clothe us in a spiritual body. He will give life to our mortal bodies (Rom. 8.11), but he is already at work in the Church. It is true that for the moment only one spiritual body exists, that of the risen Christ, but through him the Holy Spirit is already working in the Church, which thus continues the work of Christ. This is why in Acts 1.7 the risen Christ replies thus to the impatient questions of his disciples: 'It is not for you to know times or seasons . . . but you shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit'. He is the first-fruits, the

modes of the Lord's return: his coming as the risen one, his coming in the Paraclete, and his coming at the end of time. This third eschatological coming in the fourth Gospel must not be suppressed; such a mutilation would entail the arbitrary suppression of a great number of verses.

In any case it is important to underline the fact that for the historical Jesus the coming of the kingdom is already linked up with the fulfilment of his task. independently of the question of knowing the final date of this fulfilment.

earnest (II Cor. 1.22; Rom. 8.23). According to Peter's speech at Pentecost, he is the sign of the last days when God will pour out his Spirit upon all mankind (Acts 2.17). These last days—today we should say these last centuries—constitute the time between the resurrection and the return of the Lord. The victory of Christ over sin and death has ushered in this reign of the Holy Spirit on earth. This reign still belongs to the present age, but to the end of this age, since the Holy Spirit which belongs to the coming age, is already at work in it. The conquered powers still possess a certain strength; sin and death have not been abolished, though they are irremediably doomed to destruction by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. This is why the New Testament is able sometimes to speak of the conquered forces as well as of the forces which still have to be conquered, of the purity already achieved and the purity which will be ours only at the end. Only an understanding of this tension in which the Church lives can prevent the gospel from looking like a tissue of contradictions.¹⁴

Christ reigns today invisibly except to the eye of faith, but when the final struggle and the last judgment which precede the beginning of the coming age take place, he will reign before all eyes. What will happen then can be described only imperfectly and in images. The Revelation, conscious that our human language is only made for this world, uses figurative language borrowed from the Jewish apocalypses. The seer of Patmos respects the object of which he is trying to express the presence by saying: 'I see as though . . .' The millennium of which he speaks is simply an image used to suggest the participation in the final act of those who belong to Christ. All the questions regarding the details of these images are questions which the Revelation certainly raises, but they do not constitute the essence of the hope of the *parousia* which is now being discussed.

The events of the Revelation belong to the beginning of the world to come, when the present but invisible lordship of Christ will become visible. In both periods it is the same lordship. The New Testament gives us in the Synoptic and Johannine apocalypses or in the apocalyptic passages of Paul's epistles some signs announcing the approaching end: cosmic catastrophes, wars, persecutions of the Church, a final appeal to repentance. These signs will appear in many ways, in a concentrated manner, at the end of the present

¹⁴ Cf. 'The Kingship of Christ and the Church in the New Testament', no. 5 in this volume.

age, when the coming age is about to arrive. And because the present time, though extending over several generations, constitutes an eschatological unity, all these signs, which will occur at the very end of this present time, already belong to this last phase in which we have been living since the resurrection of Christ (Col. 1.13). The early Church did not believe, as we have shown, that this interim period would last several generations. But such a possibility was latent in the very heart of the hope of the Church, which did not fix a date for the end of the work of Christ. We shall be true to the New Testament if we say that, since the expectation lasts for several generations, these preliminary signs that the Revelation shows us at the very end of the interim time are already typical of the interim period as a whole. They can assume different forms in accordance with the different generations. And if the Reformers saw antichrist in the Pope, other epochs in the Church's history will see him in other figures. None of these interpretations, however, can claim to have discovered the final sign of this age which is drawing to its close, unless a computation of the date of the kingdom were to be established again by the roundabout way of the preliminary signs, and were to replace the true meaning of the hope.¹⁵

All the signs remind us that the present is itself an eschatological period, however long it is to last. Events which, without Christ or before Christ, would have been bereft of importance acquire the significance of 'signs' in the light of the Church's faith; they unite faith in the present with faith in the future without providing any opportunity for spurious computations.

The preaching of the gospel which God proclaims to the heathen through the medium of the apostles and the Church is thus a sign of the end, a sign that has lost none of its significance, despite what the Reformers believed: they apparently imagined that the apostles had already preached the gospel to all nations. No, the gospel must be preached by the Church *in every generation* as a sign of the approaching end. But the Church cannot calculate the date of the end, nor hasten its coming by fulfilling this duty which is assigned to it in the divine plan.

¹⁵ At the beginning of this war [1939-46] there were some attempts to interpret it as the apocalyptic sign of the end, and the harder times become the more the temptation to do so will increase. But the intensity of the horror is no criterion of the approach of the end. If the war ends without the return of Christ, the 'scoffers' mentioned in II Peter 3.3 will laugh at the disappointment of those who expected the end on this date. But their mockery will be directed at a false hope, not the hope of the New Testament. [This was written in 1943. Ed.].

This waiting for the return of Jesus Christ—will it not hinder the Church in the fulfilment of its task, since it cannot by any action of its own influence the unknown plan determined by God? How does hope, in fact, determine the work of the Church? That will be the subject of our fourth chapter.

(4) *What conclusions must be drawn from this hope in the return of the Lord for our life in the Church?*

How wrong and dangerous it is to separate hope from faith and isolate it from the message of the New Testament as a whole is now clear. A hope that is directed entirely to the future paralyzes action in the present. It calculates dates but it forgets that Jesus will return when God decides, and not when we try to attract him, to bring him back to earth by our actions or our knowledge. Paul fought against this kind of hope in his own age, when it appeared in the Church in Thessalonica. These men had stopped working because they believed they knew the day of the return of the Lord and they therefore despised all earthly labour. Some generations later Montanism represented the same trend in Asia Minor, and the 'fanatics' and 'enthusiasts' of Münster at the time of the Reformation also imagined they were being faithful to the gospel by refusing to work. They forgot that the essential thing about hope is not the computation of the date of Christ's return but rather the certainty that he will come in glory to fulfil his work at the end of time, that he has begun this work and is pursuing it today, though in ways hidden from our eyes. Hope in the future cannot be separated with impunity from faith in the past and the present, since one thereby runs the risk of losing the third constitutive element of the Christian message, which is love.

After all, it is not surprising that the same people who wrongly regard hope as a calculation of dates want at the same time to reject this hope, and reproach the Church with escaping from the world and turning aside from the human duties of the present. But their reproaches only apply to the false hope which seeks to compute dates, which stirs up a demoralizing eschatological fever, and paralyzes all true activity by replacing the service of the Church in and for the world by an unhealthy activism. Their reproaches do not apply to the hope of the Gospels.

We have tried to show that hope is, on the contrary, not concerned merely with the future but also with the present; the Holy Spirit,

this earnest, this portion of the world to come, has already been given to us; it helps us to live within the present framework of the imperfect world, which is a provisional state but willed as such by God. That is why we accord a real value and dignity to this world despite its problematical nature. Certainly, the fashion of this world passes, but we know that according to the plan of God we must work in it and that God has judged it good for us to do so.

In I Corinthians 7.30 Paul thus exhorts the Christians: 'let those who weep be as though they wept not, and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and those who buy as though they had no goods'. But he does not insist on the second part of the sentence merely to obscure the first part, which is also important: 'Be men who weep, who rejoice and who buy'. Is that the definition of an 'interim morality'?¹⁶ Yes, certainly. But that does not mean that for us it is a morality that has now been abolished, or is merely relative, since our interim age, too, is provided for in the plan of divine salvation and we have to live in it according to the will of God.

The Church, for which the present time is its own time, must be conscious of the value and dignity of the present time. It must pursue in this present age the work of Christ by living according to the Holy Spirit which has been given to it. For Christian faith the present is more than a trivial and indifferent passage of time. It is the time of grace, the end-time, the passing age. The Church must preach the gospel in this present time in word and deed, since, according to Matthew 24.14, the end will come only after the gospel has first been preached all over the world.¹⁷ Acts 1.6 f., which we have already quoted on several occasions, provides us with the clearest and most definite statement of this condition. To the inquisitive and impatient disciples the risen Lord replies: 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive the Holy Spirit, and you shall be my witnesses to the end of the earth'. Questions about the date must not be asked; all eyes must be fixed rather on the present in which the Holy Spirit constrains the Church to preach the gospel of salvation without pause or rest.

¹⁶ Schweitzer, *Skizze des Lebens Jesu*, 1901; *Geschichte der Leben Jesu Forschung*, 2nd edn., p. 504: 'interimistische Ethik'.

¹⁷ Cf. O. Cullmann, 'Eschatologie und Mission im Neuen Testament', *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin*, 1941, p. 98 f.; 'Le caractère eschatologique du devoir missionnaire et de la conscience apostolique de saint Paul,' *R.H.P.R.*, 1936, p. 410 f.

The eschatological determination of the present does not entail a paralysis of the Church's activity; on the contrary, it inspires and encourages it in the most effectual way. We have evidence of this in the simultaneity of the living hope and the intensive missionary preoccupations of the early Church. To be preoccupied with the expectation of the Lord's return is not a waste of time, and does not imply a turning aside from important duties.

The Church acts with power when, conscious of its faith in the past and the present and of its hope in the future, it preaches Christ in word and deed, and thereby testifies that past, present and future are most intimately united one with another. It believes by hoping and it hopes by believing. It interprets present events in the light of this faith and this hope. It shows us that events seen thus do not allow us to calculate the end, but they do enable us to understand our own age as the last epoch of the αἰὼν οὗτος, in which Christ already possesses all power in heaven and earth, in which he reigns over the invisible powers and is represented by his body the Church, but in which the hostile powers have not yet been destroyed. This age is already wholly determined by the hope of the future, since the main element of this future, the πνεῦμα (Spirit), is already here as ἀρραβὼν, ἀπαρχή (earnest) of what is coming.

Conclusion

We have now seen what, according to the New Testament, is the basis of the Church's hope in the return of Christ. We have endeavoured in particular to show the indissoluble unity of hope in the future with faith in the past and the present. This unity explains why hope cannot be eliminated arbitrarily from the total message of the New Testament as if it were merely a contingent, transient and secondary element. To sacrifice the hope of the Church or to replace it with another hope—a Platonic hope, for instance—is to abandon the true faith, since it involves destroying the pattern of the history of salvation which constitutes the beginning, the centre and the culmination of the Bible.

The final act of the drama of the history of salvation cannot be neglected without disparaging the previous acts. If the death and resurrection of Christ are not to be consummated in the future, they cease to be the central event in the past, and the present is no longer located in the space between the starting-point and the consummation of christology.

Inversely, however, it must be noted that a weakening of faith in the past and faith in the present entails a deadening and diminishing of the hope in the return of Christ. This became evident very early in the history of the Church. The Christian message lost its eschatological content because the death and resurrection of the Lord ceased to be at the centre of the faith, as they are in St. Paul. Christians no longer considered the present the final period of this age. The concurrent absence of these two elements is typical of the Apostolic Fathers, who abandoned the Pauline concept of grace anchored in the cross and resurrection, as well as almost the entire hope of the New Testament. They replaced the latter with apocalyptic reflections and speculations similar to those of Judaism and completely unrelated to the true faith. Speculations of this kind, which fail to take into account the history of salvation, are absolutely foreign to the eschatology of the Church.

Fortunately faith and hope based on the divine plan of salvation have never disappeared entirely. The presence of the open Bible in the Church has recalled the divine history of which it is the witness from generation to generation. This knowledge of the faith has always been obscured, most of all by the Gnostics of all times, who have been deeply influenced by Hellenism. This suggests that the Greek concept of cyclic time is the real cause of the neglect of the true history of salvation in theology and the Church. Hellenism collided with and modified all the religions of antiquity, and everywhere it appeared it brought a crisis in its train,¹⁸ but its influence on Christianity has been greater than on any other religion. Hellenism and Christianity are destined to clash by their very nature, since only the Church of Christ has drawn the ultimate conclusions from the concept of linear time which comprehends and unites past, present and future. It is radically opposed to all modes of Greek thought, ancient and modern. If the hope of the Church is to be restored to currency, the Hellenic concept of time must be cleared from our minds.

But to rediscover the vigorous faith of the early Christians it is even more important to restore our own period of time to its place

¹⁸ Martin Werner, in *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas*, 1941, has completely misunderstood this aspect of the question in his explanation of the birth of Christian dogma. He has inverted the true relation between Hellenism and the surrender of the eschatological perspective by making the first a result of the second: according to him the delay of the *parousia* occasioned this surrender, which led to the hellenization of Christianity; whereas, in fact, this surrender issues from the progressive hellenization of Christian thought.

within the whole history of salvation, to see it as the end-time, between the resurrection and the return of Christ. The time of the Church is founded on the cross and resurrection. It lives in expectation of the Lord's return.

It needs courage to consider our history in this way, but that is precisely what is implied by the faith of the New Testament. On this road, which leads from the suffering and risen Christ to the Lord of glory, our hope will no longer be a vague remembrance of outworn concepts but a living certainty that Christ is the same yesterday, today and in the age to come. Following the example of the Church of the New Testament we *preach* Christ who was *crucified in the past*, we *acknowledge* courageously that Christ is the Κύριος who *now reigns* hidden from our eyes, we *pray* in truth to the Christ who *is to return*: Maranatha!